

Zsófia Kathó

También de este lado hay sueños

Changing patterns of migration flows – Mexico as a new potential
migration destination

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Abstract:

Currently one can experience a growing awareness of a global phenomenon: an unprecedented level of migration. For the time being, over 244 million individuals live outside their home countries worldwide. The phenomenon of migration became a pressing political issue simultaneously on different continents, urging the governments of the states to create new strategies in order to handle the unexpected influx of immigrants and the accompanying problems reaching the cultural level of societies.

The present research investigates the factors that contribute to Mexico's transition from a traditional sending country to a new destination of migrants. Mexico has a long history as a "producer of migrants" and serves as a traditional transit country for migrants on their way to the United States. Opinions differ, but many experts believe that in recent years the nature of migration flows in Mexico has significantly changed, since Mexico is increasingly becoming a destination country.

The research is based on a sociological approach and a mixed methodology, with the purpose of analyzing information collected from academic studies, policy documents, personal experiences, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey. The research explores the issue of migration from a more "personal", qualitative approach. The goal of the thesis is: discover as many aspects of the issue as possible and confront the information gathered during the research process and background studies in the findings section. Although the results show that Mexico still plays mainly the role of a sending and transit country, there are significant ongoing changes in migration flows. The paper discusses the recent events – mostly related to the current U.S. policy -, the appearance of "new" ethnicities among migrants, and the increasing importance of leisure migration in Mexico.

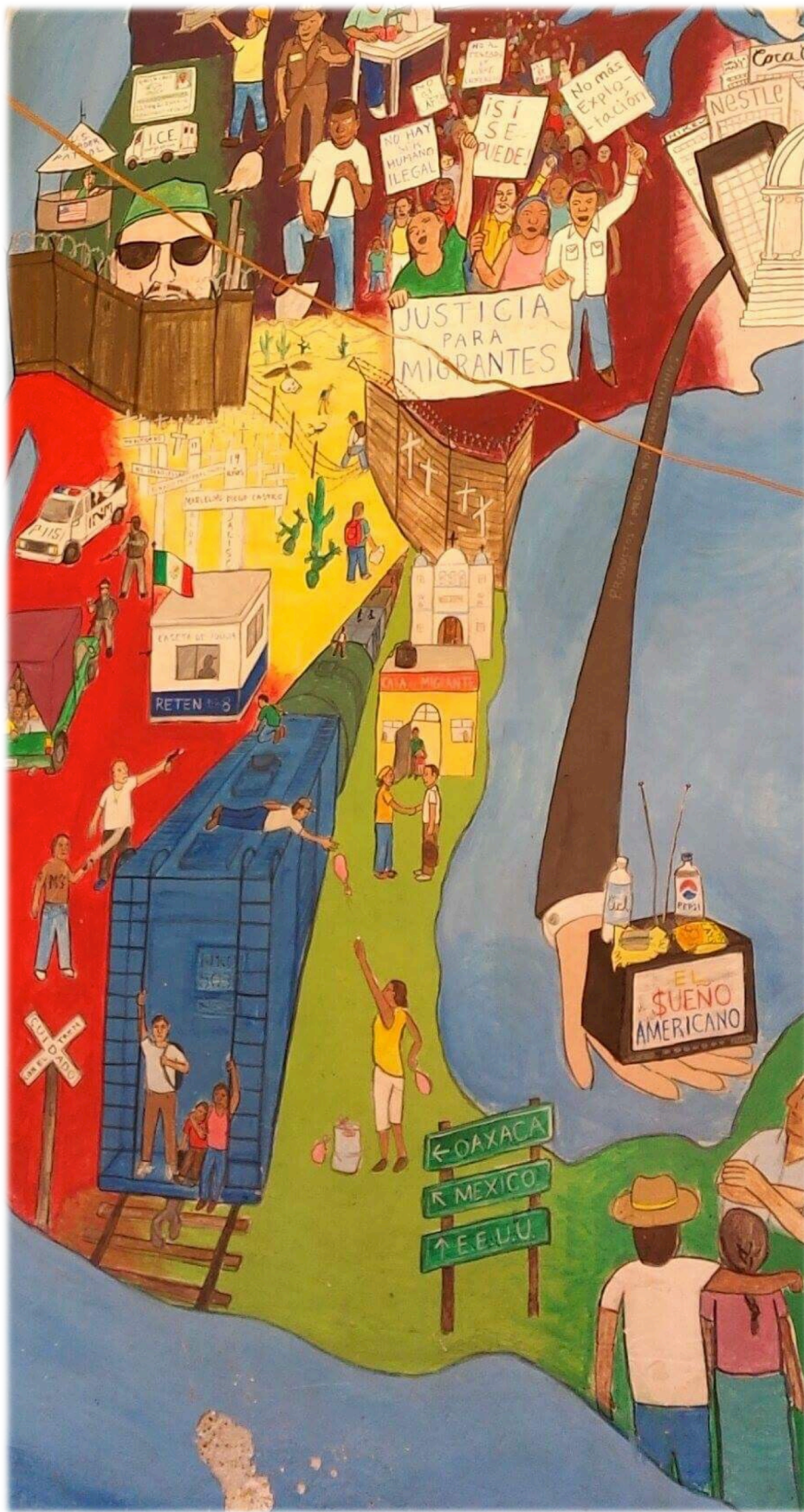
Key words: Mexico, Central America, United States, irregular migration, sociological approach, interviews, survey, changing patterns

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Painting on the wall in the migrant shelter Centro de Orientación del Migrante de Oaxaca A.C.

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Glossary

ACNUR: *La Agencia del ONU para los Refugiados* - the Spanish equivalent of UNHCR, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CA-4: (SICA) is an agreement between Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua that allows the citizens of the member states to freely enter and exit the territories of the four countries with only an identification document.

CEM: *Observatorio Nacional de la Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano*

COMAR: *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*

Combi: a type of van the migrants use as transportation on their way to the U.S.

COMI: *Centro de Orientación del Migrante de Oaxaca, A.C.*

Coyotaje: When irregular migrants are taken to the United States by smugglers (*coyotes*) for money

Coyote: smuggler of persons

DTO: Drug Trafficking Organization

GMDAC: Global Migration Data Analysis Center of the International Organization for Migration

INM: *Instituto Nacional de Migración*

IIID: International Institution for Information Design

IOM: International Organization for Migration

IRCA: Immigration Reform and Control Act

Latino: a person with Latin American roots

Machismo: exaggerated, often aggressive masculinity

Mara: the word for street gangs in the Central American region

NAFTA: North American Free Trade Agreement

PAN: *Partido Acción Nacional*

Northern Triangle of Central America: the countries of Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua

Paisanaje: the togetherness of migrants due to their nationality, shared roots.

Pollero: smuggler of persons

Renta: illegal taxation

SDG: United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals

SEGOB: *Secretaría de Gobernación*

SICA: Central American Intergration System (CA-4)

UAM: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana

UN: United Nations

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

***The title of the thesis:** *También de este lado hay sueños*: “There are dreams also on this side”; phrase on the U.S.-Mexico border in Tijuana

1. Introduction

Currently one can experience a growing awareness of a global phenomenon: an unprecedented level of migration. As the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon noted, “we are facing the biggest refugee and displacement crisis of our time” (Ban Ki Moon, n.d. quoted in UNHCR, 2015, p. 5).

For the time being, over 244 million individuals live outside their home countries worldwide (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, p. 6). By the end of 2015, 65.3 million people were forced to leave their home due to violence, conflicts, or human rights violations (GMDAC, 2015, using UNHCR data, p. 4). Among them an estimated 21.3 million are refugees (UNHCR, 2015).

21.3 million people were not only displaced from their home, but also had to move abroad, in this way increasing the level of international migration to a record level; not to mention the 19.2 million individuals displaced by natural disasters. (GMDAC, 2015, p. 8)

The changing patterns of migration flows and the ongoing “migration crisis” in Europe have generated wide interest in investigating the characteristics of this global phenomenon and its effects on receiving countries; especially since the extremely high level of human mobility caused unexpected difficulties for many countries that have no experience in dealing with mass migration. (Leal, Rodríguez & Freeman in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 11.) The fact that the question of migration is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the UN initiative – demonstrates its growing importance as a global, supranational issue. The Sustainable Development Goals urge to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies” (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, p. 10).

Thus, the globalized phenomenon of migration became a pressing political issue simultaneously on different continents, urging the governments of the states to create new laws and strategies in order to handle the unexpected influx of immigrants. As David L. Leal, Nestor P. Rodríguez and Gerald P. Freedman (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016)

summarize the current situation: we live in the “Age of Migration” that so far resulted in two main consequences:

On the one hand, as already mentioned, the migration reached a record level in recent years. On the other hand, it caused a self-protecting, negative, discriminating attitude in the receiving nations (Leal et al. in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 11). Visible changes are apparent such as the regained popularity of isolationist and anti-immigrant policies as well as a growing level of xenophobia. However, according to the report of the Global Migration Data Analysis Centre of the International Organization for Migration (GMDAC, 2015), surprisingly “in every region of the world – with an important exception of Europe – people are more likely to be in favour of migration than against it” (p. 16). As for the protectionist migration policies recently we can observe increased restrictions and border enforcement in order to regulate unauthorized migration, that highly contribute to the record level of return migration and to the increased number of migrant deaths and disappearances. (Leal et al. in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 1)

The unprecedented level of mobility, furthermore, generates a complex multicultural environment that makes it even more complicated to find adequate responses to the phenomenon. In addition, the changes in migration flows also shifted the characteristics of the map of migration: new migration destination countries appeared, such as Mexico or the European Union itself (Leal et al. in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 11).

Mexico has a long history of being a “producer of migrants” and is the country of origin of the second biggest diaspora in the world: 12.4 million Mexican nationals living in the United States (IOM, 2012). It also serves as a transit country for migrants on their way to the United States – mostly from Central America. (Alba, 2013) Opinions differ, but many experts believe that in recent years the nature of migration flows in Mexico has significantly changed, since Mexico is increasingly becoming a destination country (Alba, 2013). In this way, Mexico became “trapped” between the pressure of the wealthy Northern neighbour and the poorer Southern countries. This new situation has brought

about significant developments: for example, ensuring and protecting the rights of migrants became a priority of Mexican migration policy. (Alba, 2013)

Although there are countless studies on the topic of migration issues related to Mexico, the majority of them focuses on the aforementioned phenomenon of massive migration to the United States and on its problematics: the criminal networks and organized crime based around the issue of irregular migration, the violence and exploitation of migrants in transit, drug related violence and the legislative dimensions of the issue such as refugee protection programs, laws on the rights and status of immigrants and refugees. The studies concentrate also on the Mexican and the U.S. governments' agenda for dealing with the issue. However, few of them investigate the recent changes, the characteristics of immigration to the territory of Mexico and the new challenges they create.

Furthermore, there are recent events that must be taken into account when analyzing the situation of migration in Mexico, such as the debate about the wall on the U.S.-Mexico border and the changes in the relation between these two countries since the inauguration of Donald Trump, president of the United States; as well as the influx of “new” ethnicities to the territory of Mexico:

While the phenomenon of massive migration from Central America started with the civil wars in Guatemala, Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1960s-1980s (Alba, 2013), recently a large number of new ethnicities, mostly immigrants from Haiti, Africa and Asia appeared in Mexico causing a humanitarian crisis in the northern border-states (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2016). As Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong: Secretary of the Interior labelled the influx of African, Asian and Haitian migrants is a “serious problem” (Secretaría de Gobernación, 2016) that must be dealt with. However, since it became a pressing issue a few months ago, there is no academic analysis on the topic yet.

1.1 Research aims

The present study aims at exploring the reasons why Mexico might be a potential destination for migrants to settle down permanently; focusing mainly on Central American immigration since that is the biggest influx. The purpose of the thesis: to discover as many aspects of the issue as possible and to confront the gathered information in the phase of the analysis in order to answer the research question: *What might be the main factors that contribute to Mexico's transition from a traditional sending country to a destination country of migrants?*

In the present research I use a sociological approach and a mixed methodology, with the aim of analyzing information collected from academic studies, policy documents, personal experiences, interviews with different actors of migration issues, a survey spread by snowball sampling and a discursive style discussion with migrants on the spot.

Due to the complexity of the topic of my research, I investigate not only the immigration flows to Mexico, but I also analyze the “classical” Mexican emigration to the United States. This aspect is supposed to facilitate the understanding of the changes in motives and attitudes regarding migration, and to shed light on the government's standpoint concerning the issue. The research also includes investigating other aspects as well, such as the migration issues related to organized crime and violations against migrants; the Mexican government's viewpoint on the question and the current changes in Mexico's migration policy. As a legal context of the research, the thesis – not exclusively – uses the new Mexican migration law, the *Ley de Migración*, that was enacted in 2011 as a point of reference. The new migration law has a key role in analyzing the problematics of current changes in the situation of migration since formerly Mexico had no distinct legislation regarding the question. The issue of migration was dealt with under the federal General Population Law (*Ley General de Población*) from 1974 (UNHCR, 2000, p. 438).

Finally, by basing the research on a mixed methodology that allows me to involve personal observations, formal and informal confidential discussions, it becomes possible

to explore the issue from a more “personal” approach. This is important because of the following reasons:

As David Spener (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) states, “in the social sciences, it is all too often the case that phenomena are discussed and measured in logical, abstract and impersonal terms” (p. 118). However, especially in the case of migration, we are talking about human lives; not to mention the indisputable importance of migrant networks and personal motivations in migration issues. Therefore, the sociological approach might shed a different light on the findings of the research. The fact that I refer to the interviews along the whole thesis demonstrates how greatly the interviews shaped my understanding on the topic.

Furthermore, since in Mexico migration is a sensitive topic, it is difficult for researchers to become personally involved in the research process without risking their safety. On the other hand one experiences many controversial opinions on migration in Mexico. Thus, it is essential to investigate the issue from as many perspectives as possible. For instance, it might be significantly distinct what the government highlights on certain migration related questions, and what Mexican citizens with experience on the topic state; not to mention the priorities of drug cartels or other actors such as *coyotes*¹ in “shaping the scene” of migration. Therefore, the present research confirms its findings by interviews with various actors of migration issues such as legal and irregular migrants, Mexicans who have working experience on the field and experts on the topic. I intend to further tone the results of the research by including also the findings of a randomly spread survey that was targeting different groups of the Mexican society in order to know more about their attitude towards migration, opinions on related topics.

¹ In the region smugglers who help the migrants illegally cross the border for money are called *coyotes* or *polleros*.

2. Research framework

2.1 Structure of the research

The present research seeks to understand the ongoing changes in migration flows on the territory of Mexico in order to give an answer to the research question: *What might be the main factors that contribute to Mexico's transition from a traditional sending country to a destination country of migrants?*

Since the investigation on the topic defined by the research question involves many distinct aspects; the issues discussed in the present paper are grouped around three main questions that – in my opinion – cover the components of Mexico's potential transition to a destination country of migrants. The three main questions are the following:

- 1) *What are the dangers, risks the migrants face and how do they affect the "success" of migration?*
- 2) *How difficult is it to settle down and have a life in Mexico; and to what extent does it influence the decisions of migrants about staying in the country?*
- 3) *How open and tolerant the Mexican society is towards immigrants?*

The structure of the thesis forms as: The 3. *Background and the main components of the problem* chapter sets up the context of the research by revising the history and characteristics of migration flows on the territory of Mexico – the emigration of Mexicans to the U.S., Central American flows to Mexico and the new phenomenon of the appearance of new ethnicities from out of the region. Furthermore, it sheds light on the current legislation of migration in Mexico.

The 4. *Methodology* section elaborates on the data gathering methods, the dangers and difficulties of the research as well as on the ethical, psychological dimension of investigating a sensitive topic such as migration. The chapter also precisely explains how the different methods of data gathering were used; it provides detailed information on the main sources of findings: the interviews and the survey.

The 5. *Findings* chapter confronts the existing academic knowledge with the findings of the interviews, the survey and the personal observations collected during my one-year stay in Mexico. The findings are grouped around the three above-listed main questions and are discussed in separate subchapters. The chapter also elaborates on the legal considerations derived from the information gathered during the research process. The 6.1 *Assessment* section of the 6. *Final notes* concluding part of the thesis summarizes the ongoing changes in Mexico reflecting on the findings of the research; sheds light on the present and potential future challenges the country might face and recommends potential solutions, suggestions in order to improve its migration governance as well as the situation of migrants. The last, 6.2 *Conclusions* chapter briefly reviews the process of the research and evaluates the outcome.

2.2 Theoretical background

In this chapter of the thesis I clarify the definition of some notions related to the research topic. I consider it essential since they form the basis of the analysis of migration issues. Moreover, the present chapter also aims at explaining the complexity of migration itself.

2.2.1 Definitions of notions of migration

First of all, since the research focuses on the changing nature of migration flows on the territory of Mexico, it is crucial to bring up the question: what is migration? And what is the type of migration the research intends to analyze? As The Economist Intelligence Unit (2016) notes: “migration is a complex, cross-disciplinary, and multi-faced issue” (p.10). The notion of migration can have a wide range of definitions depending on the types of movements we would like to include. However, as a short definition, we can say, “migration is the capability to movement” (Hautzinger, Hegedüs, & Klenner, 2014, p. 6). Although, to give a more precise explanation, the International Organization for Migration defines the term as “the movement of a person or a group of persons, either across an international border, or within a State. It is a population movement,

encompassing any kind of movement of people, whatever its length, composition and causes” (IOM, Key Migration Terms, n.d.).

Therefore, as the definition points it out, migration can be *internal and external* depending on whether it happens within the territory of a state or by crossing borders. The present research focuses only on external migration which means that the migrant by passing over the border of the sending country moves into the territory of another sovereign state and stays in the host country for a longer period of time (Hautzinger et al, p. 7). However, it is important to state that emigration to another country does not necessarily mean living in a completely different culture or talking another language (the external and internal characteristics of international migration). In the case of Mexico as a migration destination country, it is important to keep in mind these differences, since for instance for Central American – Spanish speaking, Latin American – immigrants in Mexico the cultural gap between the sending and the receiving country is not as wide as, for example in the case of the North Korean community living in Nogales, Sonora (Morgan, 2014).

Another important aspect of migration is that the migrant can decide to leave his country for various reasons: better job opportunities abroad, war, natural disasters, and the like. Therefore, we must be familiar with the notions of *voluntary and forced migration*. We talk about voluntary migration when migration is a decision of the free will of the migrant – theoretically, without any forcing circumstances, however it is difficult to find “pure” voluntary migration. (Hautzinger et al, p. 12) In this case, the migration happens mostly by economic reasons. In contrast, forced migration is “a migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes” (IOM, Key Migration Terms, n.d.), which is more likely caused by humanitarian reasons: for instance war, natural disasters, diseases. Hautzinger, Hegedüs and Klenner state that “those who emigrate for non-economic reasons usually intend to return to their home country” (p. 10).

Regarding the reasons of migration and the situation in the home country, the migrant can become a refugee: the host country might declare the refugee status in case the migrant fulfills the criteria of the receiving country's law (Kardos & Latmann, 2010, p. 259).

The difference between *temporary and permanent migration* and between *individual or group/mass migration* has also great importance. The latter categorizations can mean the movement of individuals, families, ethnic groups or even whole nations. The Mexican migration law defines "migrants" as "the subjects of rights regardless of their migration state" (Ley de Migración y su Reglamento, 2012, p. 2), while the International Law prefers defining "migrant" via differentiate it from the notion of "refugee".

According to Boldizsár Nagy's categorization, migrants belong under the category of regular migration and are defined as individuals who leave their country voluntarily, live in the receiving country for more than one year and who might return to their home country in the future (Kardos & Latmann, 2010, p. 257). In contrast, under the category of irregular migration we can distinguish between unauthorized migrants – those who voluntarily migrate and violate the migration law of the host country by entering or staying there illegally – and refugees who were forced to leave or escaped from their home country for various reasons such as war, natural disasters, torture; and who entered or are staying in the territory of the receiving country without the required documentation (Kardos & Latmann, 2010, p. 257). The international law based on the Geneva Conventions of 1967 call for the protection of refugees and set up the legislation principles accordingly. Regarding the temporary or permanent characteristics of migration it is important to distinguish the phenomenon of *circular migration* as well. According to the definition of the International Organization for Migration circular migration is "the fluid movement of people between countries, including temporary or long-term movement which may be beneficial to all involved, if occurring voluntarily and linked to the labour needs of countries of origin and destination" (IOM Key Migration Terms, n.d.).

In addition, the notion of migration is closely related to the *freedom of movement*, which

is a universal human right and includes three elements: 1) the freedom of movement within the territory of a country; 2) the right to leave any country and the right to return to the home country; and it also includes 3) arrangements between States at the regional level (IOM, Key Migration Terms, n.d.).

In relation to the universal right of the freedom of movement regarding the topic of the research it is also necessary to describe the notions of human trafficking and smuggling, as well as to emphasize the differences between the two terms.

As for the act of *trafficking in persons* the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons especially Women and Children that entered into force in 2003 and is ratified by 147 states including Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua gives the following definition:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (IOM Key Migration Terms, n.d.).

Therefore, human trafficking is against the will of the victims and happens with the aim of exploitation often with violence involved; furthermore it might have national or international characteristics. Smuggling of persons, on the other hand, occurs with the consent of the smuggled individual for profit making purposes from the side of the smuggler, and with the promise of a better life in a new country from that of the migrant.

The second supplementary Protocol to the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime: the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air defines *smuggling of humans* as “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident” (IOM Key Migration Terms, n.d.).

It is essential to clarify and distinguish the above-mentioned two notions for the reason

that the acts of smuggling and trafficking in persons are deeply involved in migration issues in the region of Central America and Mexico. As Talsma (2012) notes, it is almost impossible to estimate the number of trafficked victims due to lack of information, difficulties of detection, the level of traumatization of victims. However the numbers “can range from four million to twenty-seven million” (Aronowitz, 2011 quoted in Talsma, 2012, p. 4). What is more, in the region both human trafficking and smuggling are highly profitable businesses: “sex trafficking alone in Latin America generates some 16 billion U.S. dollars annually” (Congressional Research Service, 2011 quoted by Talsma, 2012, p. 5).

On the territory of Mexico and Central America the most vulnerable groups for human traffickers and smugglers are migrants on the move, especially women and children with low educational attainment coming from the poorest regions where the level of violence and insecurity is significantly high. The same applies to members of indigenous communities. Smuggled migrants are often exposed to risks of becoming kidnapped on the way and fall into the hands of human traffickers, especially since smugglers, traffickers and other criminal groups often cooperate. (Talsma, 2012, pp. 20-21) The area between Arriaga and Ixtepec in Mexico, for instance, is considered a typical human trafficking zone (Paris et al., 2015, p. 25; Vice, 2013).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that with regard to the question of the characteristics of irregular migration, there are significant differences in the travel conditions of Mexicans and in those of Central American migrants (A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017; Spener in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016). This issue will be further analyzed in the following chapters of the thesis.

2.3 Literature Review

Since the migration issues on the territory of Mexico are countless and overlap other relating topics, no academic study undertakes to provide a comprehensive, overall view on the question.

As already noted, the majority of the studies on Mexico and migration discuss the long history and the several aspects of the emigration of Mexicans to the United States. The number of studies on Central American migration is significantly less. The Central American countries, especially the Northern Triangle of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Nicaragua), and the large-scale emigration from these countries are undoubtedly crucial regarding migration issues of the North American region. However, Central America is usually mentioned either in the context of masses of irregular migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border area or in relation to the topics of organized crime, the high level of violence in the region and the dangers of migration, since the majority of the victims of human rights violations are Central American. There exist studies focusing specifically and exclusively on Central American countries, for instance the studies of Hugo Beteta (2009) and Frank-Vitale (2011), but in a more limited number. Although, conducting researches about sensitive topics such as migration in the region of Central America is probably even more risky than in Mexico. That could explain the smaller number of academic sources available on Central America.

Among the academic sources on Mexico, a large group of studies analyze the transnational networks of criminal organizations, the issues of narcotrafficking and their relations to the local authorities, their embeddedness in national politics – for instance the studies of David A. Shirk (2011), Lara Talsma (2012) and June S. Beittel (2015).

As there are so many segments of the issue of migration in Mexico, in the present chapter instead of analyzing the contents of the different studies, I focus on the approaches of researchers and the aspects they consider the most important.

First of all, the methodology logically determines the approach of the research and vice versa. Similarly, the position, the nationality and the role of the researcher in the society – for instance in case of NGOs – modify the perspective and the content of the research as well.

Francisco Alba, the professor and researcher of the El Colegio de México, whose name shows up in a great number of studies on Mexico and migration, usually approaches the topic from an analytical, critical viewpoint. Generally, Alba believes that there are certain changes going on in Mexico's migration policy and states that the country is becoming a new destination of migrants. However the majority of migrants entering Mexico seek the so-called "American dream". (Alba & Castillo, 2012)

Alba and Castillo (2012) as well as París, Zenteno, Treviño and Wolf (2015) believe that the civil society plays a crucial – and an effective – role in promoting and defending human rights.

As for the emigration of masses from Mexico, Alba (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) emphasizes that Mexico should work on making the country more attractive for its own nationals and also for immigrants: "There should be a political decision, at the highest level, to improve domestic, economic and social opportunities and working conditions to encourage people to stay in the country" (p. 52).

As a further problem Mexico should deal with, David Spener (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) highlights the presence of structural and cultural violence in the Mexican Society² (p. 118). David Spener in his research *Se Batalla Mucho: Border Enforcement and the Story of Hilda and Julián* (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) uses an ethnographic approach to examine the difficulties Mexican irregular migrants face on their journey to the United States. Spener (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) believes that in social sciences in many cases the issues are approached and analyzed in a "logical, abstract and impersonal way" (p. 118). However certain topics require a more "personal", "real life experience oriented" analysis. Consequently, he emphasizes the key role of personal contacts and networks in the life of migrants, as well as the importance of such a strong tie as the common origins. As a conclusion of his research we can understand that the migrants approach the poor

² Direct, structural and cultural violence are the notions of Johan Galtung's TRANSCEND approach: these are the three levels of violence. Direct violence is an event; that is the „lightest" form of violence. We talk about structural violence when it is embedded in the institutional system of the country. The deepest level is cultural violence, when violence is part of the culture: „it is the hardest to change, it is the deep-rooted constant, which legitimates direct and structural violence" (Graf, Kramer & Nicolescou, 2007, p. 131).

conditions and abuses they suffer in a different way: they always keep in mind the goal and compare the temporary inhumane conditions to the future that awaits them in the United States.

Noelle K. Brigden (2016) and Amelie Frank-Vitale (2011) similarly to Spener also highlight that the viewpoint of migrants is underrepresented in qualitative studies on migration issues and emphasizes the importance and advantages of ethnographic research. As Brigden (2016) states: “by emphasizing lived experience anthropology points to how everyday material practice shapes place, identity and common sense understanding of the world around us” (p. 344)

Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, at the same time, uses a gender-based approach in her studies and explains the problematics of *latino* – usually Mexican – migration from the perspective of cultural patterns. For instance she often discusses the question of *machismo*, the stereotypical male dominance and its consequences in Latin America. (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner in Brod & Kaufman, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992) In her studies she emphasizes that despite this stereotype one can observe an increasingly egalitarian role of men and women: since often the husband goes abroad and the wife stays at home they both need to learn to complete each other’s traditional tasks.

The study of María Dolores París, René Zeneto, Javier Treviño and Sonja Wolf (2015), researchers of the El Colegio de la Frontera Norte gives a significantly more negative view on migration emphasizing its dangers and the reliability of migrants on *coyotes* and other actors who aim at exploiting them. The chapter *La corrupción y la migración como negocio* of their study emphasizes on the fact that a whole „industry” is built around irregular migration in Mexico and Central America: the exploitation of transit migrants by various members of the society is a highly profitable business.

The study, besides the “businesslike” characteristics of migration and the violence in the region, sheds light on the differences between Mexican and Central American migrants, as well as between men and women on the move. However, the interviewees of their

research report constant abuses against migrants by the authorities, a high level of corruption and a strong presence of xenophobia, their answers give a different, “insider-like” explanation for the issue: First of all, the interviewees note that the Mexicans are social and ready to help in case there are only a few immigrants or foreigners in a certain territory. However when this number significantly grows, they do not favour the presence of foreigners. (París et al., 2015, p. 28) Secondly, there is an additional problem: migrants generally pass by poor regions where the native Mexicans themselves live under very poor conditions: without sufficient drinking water and food resources, and so on. Therefore, when the migrants arrive and volunteers show up in the region to help them – for instance by bringing food, cloths, building a shelter – the Mexicans feel that even though they are the locals, the migrants get more attention, more help from the private and public institutions. The following sentence perfectly summarizes their opinion: “if human rights are for humans, then we are the primal because we are the Mexicans” (París et al., 2015, p. 28). The study of González-Murphy and Koslowski (2011) also states that Mexico does not favour the presence of a large number of foreigners and rather intends to restrict their rights in the country in order to prevent large-scale immigration (p. 5).

In contrast to the above-mentioned researchers, Benson (2015) and Korpela (2014) concentrate on the phenomenon of lifestyle migration that represents a relatively new field of social research. Benson (2015) emphasizes the importance of distinguishing lifestyle migration from tourism since it involves a life decision from the part of the migrant; and its social economic importance due to its close relation to consumption and the affluent, “privileged” status of leisure migrants. (pp. 10-13)

Finally, we must mention the work of the civil sphere in the protection of human rights and in revealing the abuses conducted by state officials. In this respect we should highlight the work of NGOs, migrant shelters, and even university students. As an example for their highly valuable activity in the field: recently the students of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) won the price of the International Institution for Information Design (IIID) for their online interactive project that provides easily accessible information about migration in Mexico and visualizes the migration

routes and the size of influxes. According to the students, they considered the creation of such a website³ useful since “the lack of public and accessible data is an obstacle to the understanding of the phenomenon of migration and this way to the possibility to make a change in national politics” (Alumnos de la UAM, 2017).

Furthermore, we must also highlight the crucial role of the Catholic Church via the migrant shelters all over the country. The shelters seek to protect and help the migrants as long as they are staying in Mexico and are usually based on volunteer help (Gómez, 2017; Murphy, 2016; Pérez, 2017; Vice, 2013) The migrant shelters contribute to the literature on migration issues in Mexico since they often publish reports or appear in media articles, documentaries or in reports by national and international organizations.

2.3.1 Migration theories

In addition to the various approaches of academic studies and researches, I find it inevitable to highlight some of the most relevant migration theories as well with the intention of exploring the potential driving forces of migration:

One of the most popular migration theory is the *Push-pull theory* by Ernest George Ravenstein. According to the theory the factors that generate migration are “push factors” in the place of origin that motivates the migrants to leave: such as poor economic situation, war, discrimination, no career opportunities. While on the other hand, “pull factors” attract the migrants to move to the destination country. Pull factors can be a better job opportunity, developed education system, democratic political system, and the like. (Hautzinger et al., 2014, p. 24) Ravenstein’s concept is usually used in the context of the individual rational choice theory, which supposes that individuals are rational and make their decisions by calculating the best outcome and the potential risks (King, 2012, p. 13).

³ The website is available at: <http://migrantic.mx>

The assumption of rational individuals leads us to the migration model of George Borjas: the Microeconomic model – *Human capital theory*. According to this model, the individuals think rationally, analyze the costs and risks of emigration, and decide to leave in case they benefit from the process of migration even after calculating all the potential risks. The benefits the migrant gains from the process could be economic, but also experience, new language skills, and so on. (Hautzinger et al. 2014, p. 26)

Concerning this non-material side of the issue, the more recent *Theory of migrant networks* brings about new perspectives in the analysis of the motives of migration. This theory instead of the usual economic approach focuses on the importance of personal connections and examines the phenomenon of migration not only as the movement of individuals, but also that of interconnected networks. The Theory of migrant networks is an inter-disciplinary approach that aims at “bridging the gap between individualistic decision-models and the various phenomena of migration networks and chain migration proven by qualitative social research” (Haug, 2008). As already noted, in the case of Mexican migration issues it is especially important to involve a distinct approach, such as the Theory of migrant networks, in the research context since the causes of migration in the region are not purely economic. Furthermore, a distinct approach is essential also for the reason that “micro-level economic migration theories take into account individual and structural conditions, but neglect non-economic migration to a large extent and are hampered by empirical weakness and lack of realism” (Haug, 2008).

The Theory of migrant networks emphasizes the role of connections that creates expanded, even transnational networks between individuals, this way facilitating the decision-making process and migration. According to Haug’s definition (2008), “a migration network can be defined by a composite of interpersonal relations in which migrants interact with their family or friends. Interactions within social networks make migration easier by reducing the costs and risks of moving.” Furthermore, since migrant networks connect former migrants, recent and future migrants, they create a certain form of social capital (King, 2013, p. 21). The Theory of migrant networks highlights the social and demographical aspects of migration, as well as the importance of cultural ties

(Haug, 2008). In addition, the theory includes examining smuggling and trafficking networks, which is a crucial element of migration issues in Mexico.

Finally, the research also uses as part of the theoretical background Granovetter's notion of the "*strength of weak ties*", according to which similarities between two social groups, such as cultural or ethnical ties, being in the same situation, and friendships can create empathy and mutual understanding (King, 2013, p. 22). This theory supports the view that Mexico has a somewhat more empathetic approach to the issue of Central American migrants, since it has a long tradition of being a "producer" of hundreds of thousands of emigrants to the United States (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 19).

3. Background and the main components of the problem

Mexico is traditionally a sending country of immigrants and a transit territory for migrants who hail mostly from Central America to the United States of America. With 8.85% of its population living abroad (IOM, 2012) Mexico has the highest emigration rate, and the second largest diaspora in the world: an estimated 12.4 million Mexicans living in the United States. This large Mexican population in the U.S. produced approximately 25 billion USD of remittances in 2015 (GMDAC, 2015, p. 15). In comparison, in the territory of Mexico the number of foreigners (961,121 individuals) constitutes only the 1% of the population with the majority from the United States – who are mostly U.S.-born Mexicans - and Guatemala (Sin Fronteras, n.d.).

As for the immigration to Mexico, the country receives a growing influx of Central American migrants and, to a smaller extent, other ethnicities such as migrants from Africa, Asia, South America, and Haiti. The majority of these individuals have the aim to cross through the territory of Mexico in order to reach the United States.

As Talsma (2012) states, “the corridor through Mexico is one of the most used mixed migration routes in the world, with the U.S.-Mexico border being the most crossed border worldwide” (p. 1), where a large number of migrants intend to enter the territory of the United States illegally. According to the statistics, in 2013 414,000 individuals were detected on the Southwest border of the United States (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, p. 44) and an estimated 11.3 million immigrants lived in the U.S. illegally in 2014 (GMDAC, 2015, p. 12).

The present chapter aims at exploring the nature of the different migration flows on the territory of Mexico and at providing an over-all knowledge on how migration issues are dealt with, as well as on the challenges the country and the migrants face. Furthermore, since the seasonal or permanent immigration of mostly retirees from the United States

and Canada is also becoming significant in Mexico, this chapter intends to briefly discuss the phenomenon of leisure migration as well.

3.1 U.S.-Mexico Migration

The United States and Mexico are highly intertwined and interdependent in many aspects: As David A. Shirk (2011) formulates it, “they are connected by more than 300 billion USD in annual cross-border trade, tens of millions of U.S. and Mexican citizens in binational families, and the everyday interaction of more than 14 million people living along the nearly two-thousand-mile shared border” (p. 5). Both Mexico and the United States – as well as Canada – are members of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Mexico is the third largest trade partner of the United States (Shirk, 2011, p. 4), the second largest market for U.S. exports (Anaya, 2017) and the third largest producer of U.S. imports (Shirk, 2011, p. 4). Furthermore, Mexico sends the largest number of tourists to the United States: 20 million people in 2016 alone (Anaya, 2017).

The history of the large-scale Mexican migration to the United States dates back to the Second World War, more precisely to the Bracero Program, which was a temporary labor agreement between the two countries that offered job opportunities for Mexicans in the U.S. Through the program, hundreds of thousands of guest workers (mainly for agricultural work) emigrated to the territory of the United States regularly or irregularly during the years of 1942 to 1964. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 3) In the years of the late 1990s since the development of employment opportunities in Mexico were almost exclusively focused in urban areas, emigration became the only choice for many inhabitants of rural zones: “they could choose between internal or international migration” (Escobar & Janssen, 2006, p. 5).

Since the Bracero program caused a – to a great extent irregular – mass migration to the U.S. from Mexico, in 1954 the U.S. government initiated a campaign, the so-called Operation Wetback, with the aim of the deportation of unauthorized migrants. (Leal et al. in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 15)

However, after the large-scale removals of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans by the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, the U.S. provided amnesty to some undocumented migrants; and at the same time, introduced increased penalization on employers who hired undocumented workers. (Leal et al. in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 15)

Consequently, after the enactment of IRCA, Mexico was “forced” to shape its own standpoint regarding the migration issues between the two countries; and it decided to open up for dialogue and negotiations. Before that, concerning migration Mexico was following a “policy of not having a policy” (Alba, n.d. quoted in Escobar & Janssen, 2006, p 17). Therefore, Mexico preferred to avoid the formulation of a clear approach towards the question of migration. Later on, primarily due to the working conditions of Mexicans in the United States, the protection of migrant rights became a central issue of the political agenda of Mexico, however there were still no significant cooperation between the two countries.

By 2011, after decades of dealing with the problematic situation and several bilateral agreements, the two countries reached a “negotiating attitude” and an intention to cooperate (Alba, 2016, p. 44). However, the terrorist incident of 9/11 brought about serious changes in the policy of the United States: the economic approach was pushed into the background, the national security and the war on terrorism became priority. That resulted in increased border control and restrictions (Alba, 2016, p. 49). In the following decades – until now – the governments of the two countries constantly intended to improve the management of migration issues, especially the swarms of unauthorized migrants on the U.S.-Mexico border. However, there is still no adequate solution for the above-mentioned problems from neither of the states (Alba, 2016, p. 52). As Shirk (2011) notes, “security collaboration between the United States and Mexico has traditionally suffered from asymmetrical capabilities, divergent priorities, and frequent distrust” (p. 14) due to the underdevelopment of Mexico’s institutional system and the high level of corruption in the country.

A further constant problem concerning the U.S.-Mexico relations is the transnational network of drug trafficking and other criminal organizations that are increasingly present in the United States. According to the report of the Congressional Research Service, Mexican drug trafficking organizations are present in more than a thousand American cities and “dominate the supply and wholesale distribution of most illicit drugs in the United States” (Beittel, 2015, p. 3). The presence of criminal organizations and the high level of violence, furthermore, undermine the public security in both countries and generate forced migration. (Shirk, 2011, p. 5). Therefore, as Barack Obama said about the campaign of the Calderón Administration against criminal organizations and narcotrafficking: “We are very mindful that the battle President Calderón is fighting inside of Mexico is not just his battle; its also ours. We have to take responsibility just as he’s taking responsibility” (Shirk, 2011, p. vii). The Mérida Initiative of 2008 – that among others aims at jointly fighting against organized crime and promotes the protection of human rights – is a great example for the cooperation of the United States and Mexico (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

3.1.1 The characteristics of U.S.-Mexican migration

Regarding the characteristics of U.S.-Mexican migration, one of the biggest challenges the two countries face is the phenomenon of *coyotaje*,⁴ which is a common practice alongside the U.S.-Mexico border since the early twentieth century (Spener, 2016, p. 117).

In Mexico, the issue of *coyotaje* and the relations between migrants and *coyotes* – or *polleros* (human smugglers) as they are called in the region – is a quite complex and odd phenomenon since there is a “social embeddedness of their relations” (Spener, 2016, p. 132).

⁴ When unauthorized migrants are taken to the United States by smugglers (*coyotes*) for money, is called *coyotaje*.

As the study of David Spener (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) demonstrates, in Mexico usually the *coyotes* and the migrants personally know each other; often they are family-related. This way they build up a mutually beneficial relationship: the migrant – or usually a family member who has already emigrated to the U.S. – pays when they arrive to the destination (p. 121). In case the migrant gets arrested or does not arrive to the U.S. for other reasons, the *coyote* will not get paid. This way it is in the interest of both the migrant and the *coyote* to cooperate. (Spener in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 140) As a brief conclusion, when hired by Mexicans, the *coyotes* mainly have economic motivation, therefore they are more trustworthy and exploit the migrants significantly less frequently than in the case of Central American migrants who have no social connections to the smugglers. Exploitations of migrants from Central America, especially that of women and children – meaning sexual servitude, inhuman labour conditions, forced recruitment by criminal groups, and the like – as well as violence, abandoning or killing the migrants are more common.

The other important characteristic of migration in the region – that is especially applicable for Mexican migrants – that must be highlighted is the importance of migrant networks. From Mexico usually young men from regions without insufficient employment opportunities go to the United States, first, for temporary work from the age of sixteen. The typical way of financing the first trips of the new generation is the following: someone who is already in the U.S. and could collect enough money for paying the *coyote*, helps the younger migrants to go abroad. Later on, when the new migrant gained enough income, he pays his debt back. (Spener in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 120)

It is beneficial since, on the one hand, this way the migrants are protected: they do not have to carry large amount of money when crossing the border, and on the other hand, financing the first trip becomes less difficult. According to Spener (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) this strategy is an evidence for the “migrants” attempt to use the social capital

inhering in their relations with members of their networks of kinship and *paisanaje*⁵ to manage the risks they face in their cross-border journeys” (p. 126).

As the research of Lara Talsma (2012) demonstrates, financially it is worth for Mexicans emigrating irregularly to the United States since they might find employment within two weeks and may be able to earn up to nine times as much as they would in Mexico (p. 12).

Furthermore, regarding migrant networks and the recent changes in migration flows, it is also inevitable to mention the phenomenon of second-third generation migrants becoming more and more citizens of the host country and “loosing” their original roots. The recent migration laws also contribute to strengthen this phenomenon: for instance in the United States, Germany, or Mexico, the family members of those who have the citizenship of the country or a permanent residence permit, can easily get the same documents; promoting this way chain-migration. (Leal et al. in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 8) The afore-described phenomenon largely contributes to the expansion of diasporas, and this way to the extension of migrant network; that correspondingly highly facilitate the situation of future migrants. The role of the Mexican diaspora in the U.S., for instance, and the country’s connection to it has a great importance, mostly due to economic reasons.

In spite of the help the migrants might receive via their connections, they always take a high risk when they choose the irregular way of migration. Therefore, I would like to emphasize the dangers of crossing the border as a fourth attribute of the Mexico-U.S. migration:

The usual routes are extremely dangerous, many people die or get arrested on the way. The migrants often walk for 4-5 days through deserts without proper water resources, or cross through hazardous rivers and canals. However, the majority of the migrants are aware of the risks, have realistic expectations and still take the risks for the chance to have a better life. (Spener in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 141) Lara Talsma’s (2012)

⁵ *Paisano* means countryman. Therefore, *paisanaje* is the togetherness of these migrants due to their nationality, shared roots.

research perfectly demonstrates the formerly described attitude by quoting a Salvadoran migrant: “We are going to die, one way or another” (p. 11).

In recent years, between 2014 and 2017 a number of 20,120 migrants died or went missing, among them 1,105 on the U.S.-Mexico border area, which is the fourth most dangerous irregular migration route according to the statistics of the International Organization for Migration (GMDAC, 2017). The most common causes of death on the U.S.-Mexico border are dehydration among the migrants who use the Mexico-Arizona route; and drowning among those who try to cross the Rio Grande in order to arrive to Texas. Formerly, the number of deaths by dehydration used to be higher than that of drowning, however it has changed in 2014 and 2015, for the first time since 2001 (GMDAC, 2016, p. 8).

Although we must note that there are even bigger dangers and difficulties for migrants on their way through the territory of Mexico. Since those apply mostly to Central Americans fleeing from gang violence, this segment of the risks of migration is discussed in the *3.2. Central American migration* subchapter.

3.1.2 Return migration

Finally, the context of U.S.-Mexico migration also involves the analysis of the question of return migration – mostly meaning deportations or forced returns – as a recent pressing issue. According to Ricardo Anaya Cortés, president of the Mexican National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional* - PAN), since 2009 more Mexicans left the United States than emigrated there. He says, between the years of 2009 and 2014 one million persons returned to Mexico while 870,000 left for the U.S. (Anaya, 2017)

However, since around 450,000 unauthorized Mexican migrants enter the United States yearly according to the IOM (2012) statistics, in recent years the government imposed increased restrictions and more stringent border control that caused an unprecedented level of return migration – voluntarily or forcibly via deportations and repatriations. The

United States intends to deter unauthorized migration by deporting 3,000-4,000 people a day (Hiemstra, 2016). In 2011, 93% of the deported migrants were from Mexico or from Central America (US DHS, 2012 cited in Leal et al. in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 11). However, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico, “since the year of 2009, the number of Mexicans who return to the country is practically the same as the number of those who decide to leave” (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016).

When discussing the issue of return migration – especially in the case of deportation – the emphasis is on the complex consequences of it, for both the migrants and the receiving country. In the case of Mexico, one can not only observe the return of Mexican nationals from the United States, but also many other ethnicities, such as Central Americans or Haitians. They choose to stay in Mexico, mostly close to the border, when they are forced to leave the territory of the United States due to their unauthorized status. These ethnic groups face the same, or even more complicated challenges than the Mexican return migrants.

In relation to the consequences of increased return migration, first of all, we must mention its negative effect on the economy of the sending country due to sharp decrease of remittances from abroad. In countries that are highly dependent on the remittance the migrants send home, such as the countries of the Northern Triangle of Central America, large-scale return migration can cause serious economic problems. (Beteta, 2012, p. 12)

In the case of Mexico, the economic outcomes of the remittances from abroad mean more than simply a certain amount of money the country receives. Since the less affluent, more isolated groups of the society receive the remittances, the money transfers contribute to the development of the welfare system of the country. That is: when the remittances significantly and permanently drop, the government will have to rearrange a larger amount of money to be spent on the welfare system. (Zoltán, personal interview, April 11, 2017)

As for the returnees, the typical challenges they face are the following: their re-integration to the society becomes problematic since they have different experiences, usually a better financial situation than those who have never left the country, and higher, distinct expectations their country can provide. Hence, return migrants can contribute to the cultural revival of their community, but on the other hand it also creates inequality. (Masferrer & Roberts in Leal & Rodríguez 2016, p. 254) In addition, after spending a long time abroad and working in a different country – often as an unauthorized migrant - the returnees face problems in job seeking as well since they do not have the required papers. (Masferrer & Roberts in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 241) Another typical difficulty is that despite the higher prestige the returnees acquire in their home community due to their experiences abroad, the majority – especially those who were forcibly sent home – intends to emigrate again, which makes the re-integration process even more difficult. In addition, we also have to mention the effect of deportations on those family members of the returnee who stay abroad.

A new phenomenon regarding return migration is that many of the migrants return to elsewhere within the country than emigrated from. Thereby in Mexico new migrant sending and receiving states appeared, such as Veracruz as a new sending state (Masferrer & Roberts in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 238) or the most touristic states of Quintana Roo and Yucatán as destinations of returnees (Masferrer & Roberts in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 245) and of migrants from developed countries.

3.2 Central American migration

In recent years the growing size of Central American migration to or through the territory of Mexico created new challenges on the stage of migration. Historically, the migration between Mexico and Central American countries was a constant, open phenomenon since the border territory of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize was considered a “unified economic zone” (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 1). Therefore, the mobility of persons materialized through open borders, mostly with the aim of agricultural work, trade or due to familial ties.

The phenomenon of massive migration from Central America to the United States through Mexico became a pressing issue in the 1980s when – after the beginning of the war in Guatemala in 1960 - civil wars broke out also in El Salvador and Nicaragua (Alba, 2013). Later on, between the 1980s and 1990s hundreds of thousands of refugees arrived to Mexico, mostly from Guatemala. In 1989, by the *Forma Migratoria de Visitante Local*, the Mexican government provided short-term visitor visas for Guatemalans that allowed them to enter the country repeatedly. Later on, by the visa extensions, agricultural and general workers became included as well under the category (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 4).

In the 1990s when the civil wars ended, although the peace was re-established and country stepped on the way towards the democratic transition, unemployment and continuous demographic growth still remained unresolved problems in the region, not to mention public insecurity - mostly due to gang violence -, extreme poverty and large inequalities. (Beteta, 2012, p. 1) Though, the level of poverty was significantly decreased in the region in the last two decades, more than half of the population of Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua – and nearly half of the whole region - still live in poverty. (Beteta, 2012, pp. 8-12) Furthermore, the region is exposed to natural disasters, such as hurricanes and earthquakes; as well as to the effects of climate change. As Hugo Beteta notes (2012), about 8.4 million people live in potential hurricane zones (p. 1). As an additional problem, the continent's international narcotic trade routes cross Central America, this way increasing violence and insecurity in the region. Furthermore, some believes that the enhanced war on crime and narcotrafficking in Mexico relocates some illegal activities to Central America. (Beteta, 2012, p. 1)

For the afore-mentioned reasons, emigration became a survival strategy for Central Americans both economically and due to the high level of insecurity. However the motivations of the Central American immigrants changed from humanitarian reasons to economic factors after the end of the civil wars. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 1)

What is more, since they contacted with Mexican migrants on their way to the U.S., the job opportunities on the North attracted them to join the outward migration flows to the United States. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 1) According to Hugo Beteta (2012), “over 300,000 Central Americans are estimated to reside in the United States on temporary humanitarian visas known as Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and about 1.3 million lack legal immigration status” (p. 1). Furthermore, a large number of Guatemalan refugees decided to settle down and start a new life in Mexico after the end of the civil war and its aftermath in 1996 (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 4).

Since the countries of the region highly depend on the remittances sent home from abroad, migration is also a key element of Central American economic development and plays a leading role in the reduction of poverty as well. On the other hand, the countries’ reliance on remittances on a massive scale makes the region greatly vulnerable to external economic changes; and leads to increased inequalities in the societies. (Beteta, 2012, pp. 12-16)

Mexico, in order to respond adequately to the challenges of Central American migration flows, in the early years established the National Migration Institution (*Instituto Nacional de Migración*) in 1993 and offered special temporary visas for seasonal agricultural workers and imposed restrictions on issuing tourist visas. In addition, Mexican authorities in Central American countries permitted the entry of migrants to the territory of Mexico only if they had a valid visa to the destination country (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 5). The purpose of these actions was to limit and regulate the inflow of Central American migrants, however it rather resulted in growing unauthorized migration via irregular routes and in an increased dependence on smugglers. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 5)

In the past decades, as already discussed, the protection of migrant rights became a priority of the Mexican government, as well as the enhanced fight on organized crime, trafficking in persons and violence against migrants. However, despite the new migration law and the ambitious aims of the government’s policy, as the Migration Policy Institute’s report notes (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 1): “Central American migrants

continue to be victimized by organized criminal agents as well as by local and national security forces.” In the territory of Mexico hundreds of smuggling organizations operate with the aim of the exploitation of the most vulnerable: mainly Central American women and children (IOM, 2012) who flee from their home country after becoming victims of gang violence. According to the calculations of the Amnesty International, approximately six out of every ten female migrants become victims of some type of sexual exploitation on their way through Mexico (Amnesty International cited in Talsma, 2012, p. 11). Migrants in general are highly exposed to violence and criminal activities since they are not familiar with the territory they cross, they often travel without adequate documents and prefer to choose more clandestine routes to avoid the authorities, not to mention the poor conditions of their travel. (Talsma, 2012, p. 14)

Furthermore, as the study of París, Zenteno, Treviño and Wolf (2015) states, the exploitation of transit migrants is a highly profitable business for a great variety of members of the Mexican society: for corrupt officials, criminal groups, smugglers, people who sell food or provide accommodation, and so on (p. 19).

As for other dangers of irregular migration routes, according to the analysis of the IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Center (2016), the primary cause of migrant death in the region is train accidents: a large number of migrants decide to travel on the freight train called *La Bestia* (The Beast) or “the train of death” (Talsma, 2012, p. 9) in order to “easily” cross the country, even though that the train is not designed for carrying persons. The most common accidents cause maiming by falling from the train, as well as getting hit by the train (p. 6), often with the “assistance” of criminal groups, the train personnel or members of the police and security forces. Talsma (2012) notes that “various NGOs report on infinite accounts of abuses, assaults, beatings, torture, threats, rape and other sexual violence, extortions and even killings” (p. 9). Only 2.6% of the abuses are reported mostly for the following reasons: the majority of migrants consider it useless and the rest is afraid of reprisals (París et al., 2015, p. 28). Furthermore, police and security forces participate directly in the acts of human rights violations, such as trafficking, torture and kidnapping as well. (París et al., 2015, p. 29) Just to mention some of the cases, for

instance in the widely known incident when 43 students disappeared in 2014 and were probably murdered in Iguala, Guerrero the local police was involved. The police, the mayor and his wife helped the criminal group called Guerreros Unidos to detour and kidnap the students. In addition, in the same year members of the army participated in the massacre in Tlatlaya when 22 persons got killed. (Beittel, 2015, p. 7)

An additional problem is that since the more clandestine ways of migration became more common recently, in case of death it takes a significantly longer time to find the body that further hinders the collection of proper statistical data on migrant deaths. (GMDAC, 2016, p. 7) As for abuses, “Honduran migrants seem to be the most vulnerable to extortion, robbery, kidnappings, and so on” (París, et al., 2015, p. 25).

3.2.1 The patterns of Central American migration

As for the characteristics of Central American migration, many people flee from their home countries due to the high level of gang violence and *machismo*⁶, the negative heritage of the civil wars of the 1980s (Fredrick, 2016):

As the remainder of the wars these countries had no public security, judicial or societal system; furthermore the high level of violence was powered by the arms remained accessible and by the presence of a large number of former military personnel. (Talsma, 2012, p. 12) This resulted in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala - the so-called Northern Triangle of Central America – becoming one of the most dangerous regions of the world (UNHCR Staff, 2016). What is more, the deportations of Central American and Mexican gang members from the United States also contribute to the extreme violence in the region, as well as to the extension of criminal networks all over Central America, Mexico and the United States. (Talsma, 2012, p. 13)

⁶ Exaggerated, often aggressive masculinity.

The most vulnerable groups for the extreme violence are women and children, who often seek protection in other countries, mainly in Mexico and the United States (Grillo, 2016), from street gang violence or domestic abuses; or to avoid their children getting recruited by *maras*⁷. Small business owners are also among the most vulnerable due to their obligation to pay the *renta* (illegal taxation) to the gangs, otherwise they risk their own life or that of their family members (Talsma, 2012, p. 13).

Further reason for emigration: there remain vacant employment opportunities for Central American migrants, especially in the agricultural and domestic sectors (Talsma, 2012, p. 8), as large number of Mexican migrants leave for the United States; which is also a significant factor for settling down in Mexico.

Furthermore, on the southern border of Mexico with Guatemala and Belize there are only a few regular border control points creating a fertile ground for unauthorized migration: “estimations of the number of undocumented migrants annually entering Mexico lie between 140,000 and 400,000” (Talsma, 2012, p. 8). The 50.7% of Central American migrants travel with *coyotes* on their way through Mexico and approximately 70% of them hire smugglers to help them cross the U.S. border. (París et al., 2015, p. 26)

3.2.1.1. Migration routes

There are significant differences between the migration routes and the travel conditions of Central American migrants regarding their nationalities.

Central American migrants usually enter the territory of Mexico in the states of Chiapas and Tabasco. From there, there exist three typical ways to get to the U.S.-Mexico border: 1) the first one goes through the state of Jalisco, leads alongside the Pacific coast to arrive to the border in Baja California or Sonora; 2) a second route crosses Central Mexico passing San Luis Potosí, along the coasts of the Gulf and ends up in Coahuila or Tamaulipas; 3) the third one also goes alongside the coasts of the Gulf but crosses the states of Tabasco, Veracruz and Tamaulipas. (París et al., 2015, p. 22)

⁷ Street gangs are called *maras* in the region.

Map 1. Migration routes through Mexico to the United States

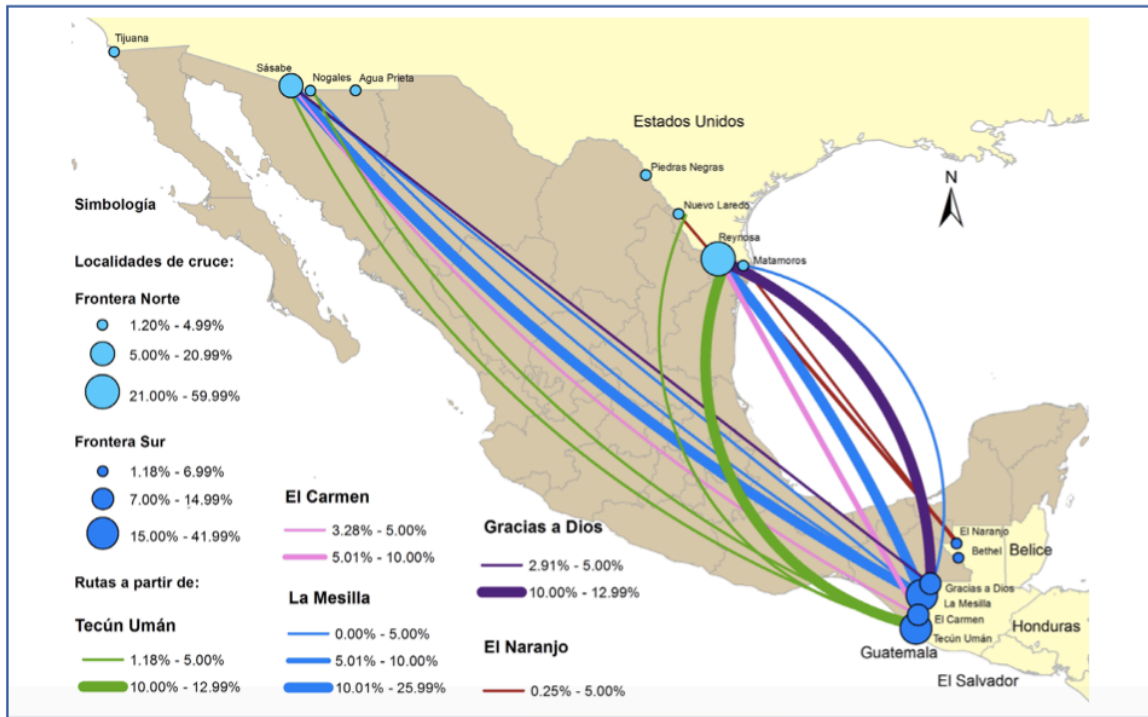


Source: Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes México (n.d.). Retrieved from: http://www.sjmmexico.org/uploads/TBL_CDOCUMENTOS_78_2_49.pdf

In recent years the second route all the way on the coasts of the Gulf is the most popular since that one is the shortest, although the most dangerous as well. Due to its high risk – since it crosses the territory of one of the most violent criminal groups called Los Zetas – recently a growing number of people choose the Central Mexican route. (París et al., 2015, p. 22)

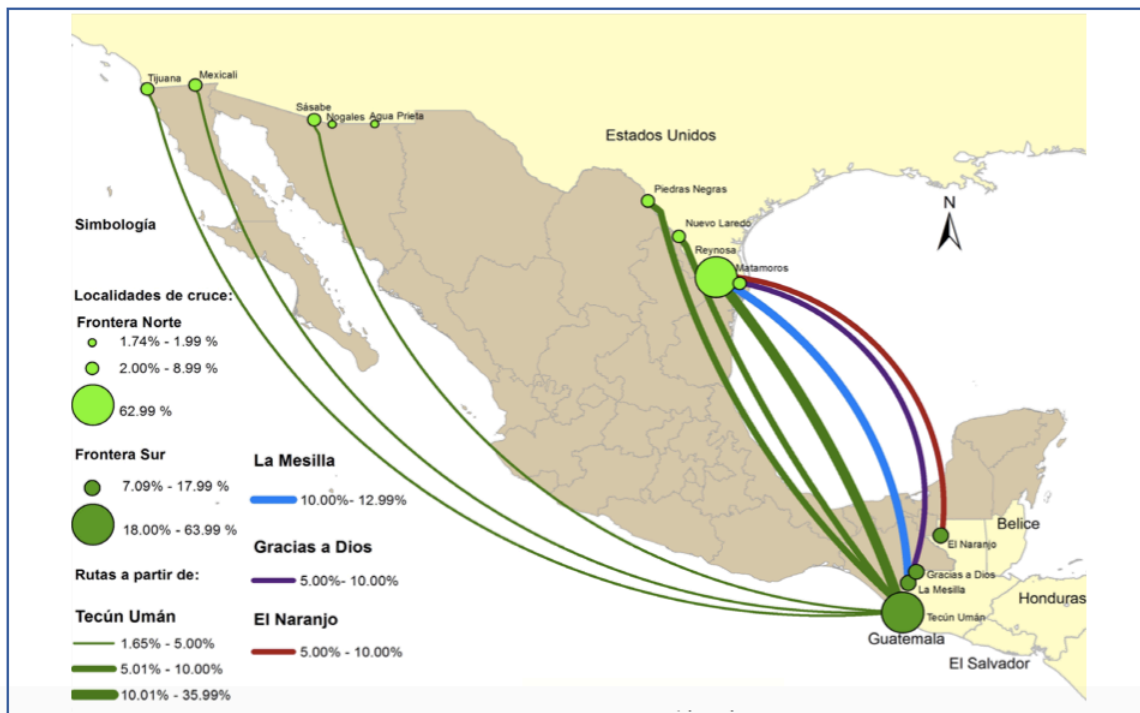
For migrants from Honduras and El Salvador the most common routes are entering Mexico at Tecún Umán, while Guatemalans use the routes through La Mesilla more often. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 9) As for their routes to the United States, the majority of Guatemalans cross the border in Sonora to arrive to Arizona. Salvadorans and Hondurans, in contrast, prefer the route on the coasts of the Gulf to reach the United States in Texas. Furthermore, a large number of migrants from El Salvador enter the U.S. through Reynosa, Tamaulipas. (París et al., 2015, p. 22)

Map 2. Migration routes of Guatemalans in 2013



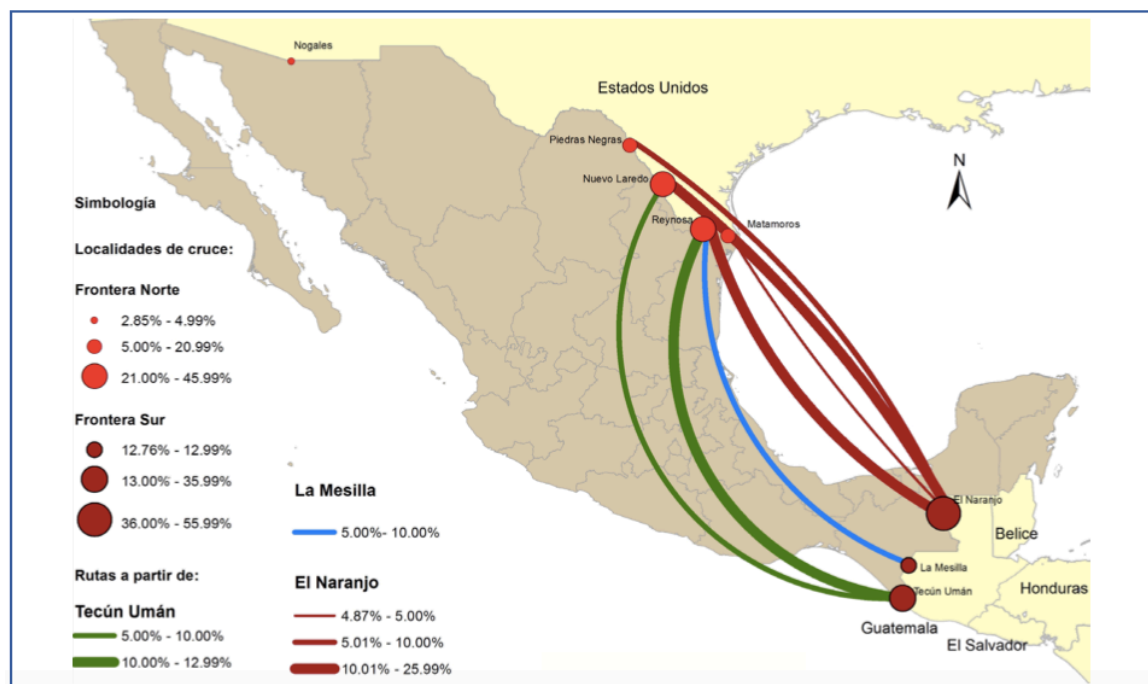
Source: Emif Sur, 2013 cited in París et al., 2015, p. 23

Map 3. Migration routes of Salvadorans in 2013



Source: Emif Sur, 2013 cited in París et al, 2015, p. 23

Map 4. Migration routes of Hondurans in 2013



Source: Emif Sur, 2013 cited in París et al., 2015, p. 24

Those who decide to settle down in Mexico for a shorter-longer time, most commonly reside in the southern border areas, such as in the city of Tapachula. Among Central American immigrants, a significantly larger number of Guatemalans than Hondurans and Salvadorans intend to stay in Mexico. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 9)

3.2.1.2 The role of criminal groups in transit migration

As the study of París et al. (2015) notes, the unprecedented violence we can observe in Mexico now dates back to 2006 when the former president Felipe Calderón launched an enhanced fight against organized crime, narcotrafficking and drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) in particular (p. 20). Although the program was partly successful – for instance some of the most powerful “kingpins” got arrested - the DTOs “violently resisted the aggressive campaign of the government” (Beittel, 2015, p. 2) that resulted in a sharp increase in violence in the region. Furthermore it led to the fragmentation of the

criminal groups and to the deeper diversification of their activities, not to mention the expansion of their networks. (París et al, 2015, p. 20) To demonstrate the outcomes of this period: before the campaign of Calderón there were four major drug trafficking organizations⁸ in Mexico. With the escalation of violence – that reached its peak in 2011 – and the segmentation of criminal groups, these dominant cartels “seem to have now fragmented to between 9 and to as many as 20 major organizations” (Beittel, 2015)⁹. Due to their diversification, DTOs now also participate in illicit activities such as extortion, smuggling of persons, kidnappings and oil theft. Some of them are often involved in abuses conducted against migrants. (Beittel, 2015, p. 9)

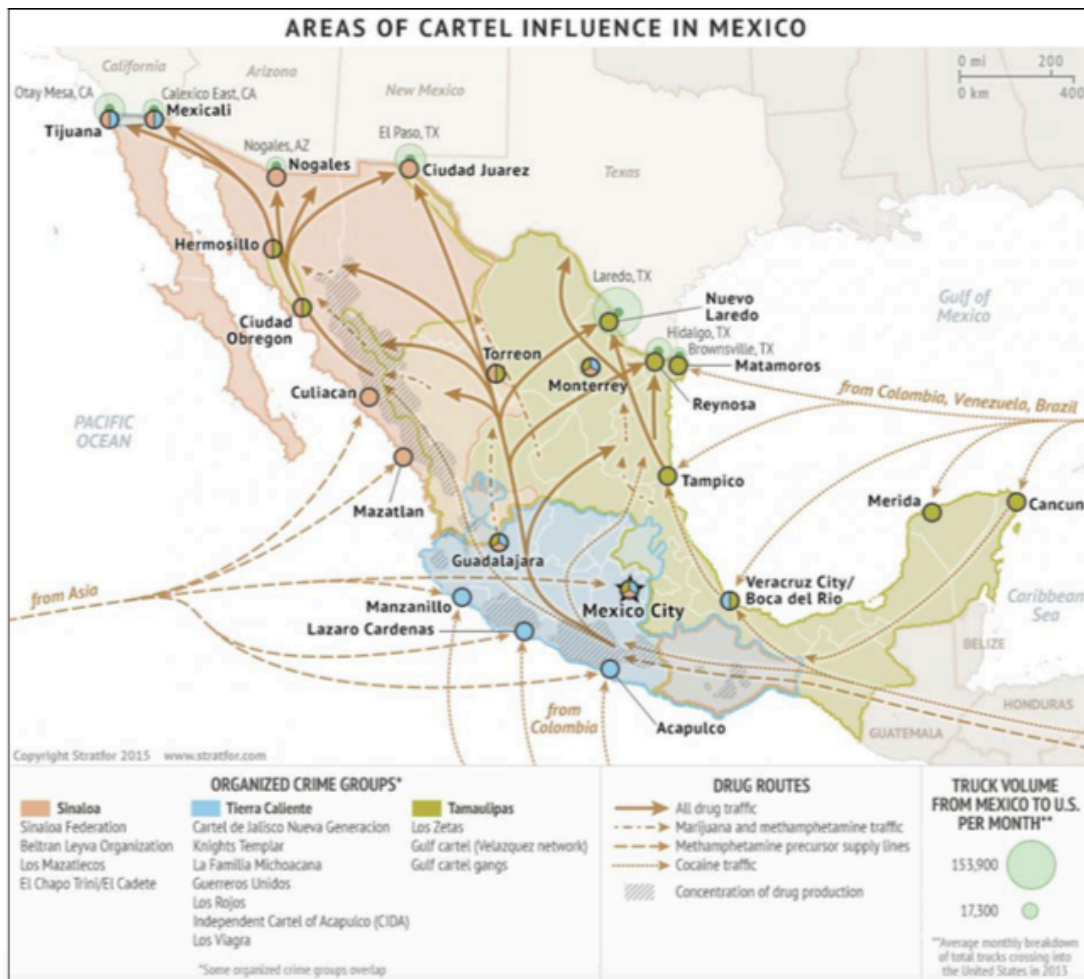
During this period a new group appeared on the scene: the so-called Los Zetas who seceded from the *Cártel del Golfo*. This group consisted of former corrupt special force members of the Mexican army who functioned as the hitmen of the cartel. With their separation and the creation of their own cartel, now they form one of the most violent criminal groups. (Beittel, 2015, p. 20) They have an extensive network that involves many different actors of the society who work for them: such as taxi drivers who report everything they see, *coyotes* both from Mexico and Central American countries, and smaller criminal groups called Los Zetitas – the “little Zetas” – since they are not officially part of the cartel. These criminal groups, and particularly Los Zetas, are involved in all criminal activities related to transit migration: smuggling, trafficking in persons, kidnappings, sexual exploitation, and so on. (París et al., 2015, p. 20)

Their direct involvement in migration issues derives from the fact that both the typical migration routes and the narcotrafficking routes cross the territory of these criminal organizations:

⁸ These four dominant DTOs were the Tijuana/Arellano Felix Organization, the Sinaloa Cartel, the Juárez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization and the *Cártel del Golfo* (Beittel, 2015)

⁹ Beittel (2015) notes that currently the most powerful DTOs are the Sinaloa Cartel, Los Zetas, Tijuana/Arellano Felix Organization, Juárez/Vicente Carrillo Fuentes Organization, Beltrán Leyva, *Cártel del Golfo* and the La Familia Michoacana.

Map 5: Territories controlled by criminal organizations and the narcotrafficking routes¹⁰



Source: The map of Stratfor Global Intelligence, 2013 used in Beittel, 2015, p. 30

With the appearance of the Los Zetas not only the level of violence grew, but the conditions of smuggling changed as well. Previously the *coyotes* were profit-oriented individuals working alone, taking familiar people to the United States. Therefore, they used to be mostly reliable¹¹. However, as París et al. (2015) notes, in the year of 2014 their situation changed due to the enhanced control of migration in Mexico and that smuggling of persons was codified a criminal offense (p. 21). For the above-mentioned

¹⁰ Under the different coloured territories we can see the list of criminal groups who control the area. The arrows show the drug trafficking routes that basically cover the routes of migrants. (See the migration routes on Map 1)

¹¹ As we already mentioned in the 3.1.1 *The characteristics of U.S.-Mexican migration* chapter referring to the study of David Spener (in Leal et al., 2016).

reasons *coyotes* gave up working alone: nowadays multiple actors coordinate the journey of migrants on their way to the United States in certain “stations” of the routes such as on the Mexico-Guatemala border, in Mexico City and on the U.S.-Mexico border. (París et al., 2015, p. 21) In the following year, the *coyotes* – both from Mexico and Central America – started working with the Zetas who a few years later started charging them a 100 dollars per migrant in exchange for a safe journey to the border. “If they do not pay the tax, the migrants suffer the consequences” (París et al., 2015, p. 21).

Currently, an estimated 53,000 Guatemalans, 15,000 Hondurans and 10,000 Salvadorans live in the territory of Mexico. (IOM, 2015) The number of migrants from Guatemala still remains the largest among the Central American nationalities with 2640 individuals entering the country in 2014 (OECD). The report of the IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Center (2016) notes, “the number of people leaving Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador is now similar to the number who fled during the violent conflicts in Central America in the 1980s” (GMDAC, 2016, p. 6).

In Mexico, the Commission for Refugee Assistance (*Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*, COMAR) helps to protect the migrants and their rights and facilitates the process of evaluation of asylum claims. Since the enactment of the new Mexican migration law, the Commission considers gender violence as well when revising the applications for asylum. Additionally, these days an estimated 1,600 refugees in Mexico are receiving financial support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – that works on the protection of refugees parallelly to COMAR. (Fredrick, 2016)

3.3 Other ethnicities on the territory of Mexico

Recent years, besides the growing level of Central American immigration, one can observe other shifts in the patterns of migration flows: namely the phenomena of increased numbers of irregular migrants from Africa, Asia; and the formation of lifestyle migration from developed countries, mostly from the United States and Canada. (IOM, 2017)

3.3.1 Leisure migration

Leisure or lifestyle migration “refers to the phenomenon whereby citizens from affluent and industrialized nations move abroad in order to find a more meaningful and relaxed life” (Korpela, 2014). According to the International Organization for Migration (2017), the number of migrants from developed countries in the region of Central America and the Caribbean is around two million individuals – 1 million in Mexico -; and the category mostly involves retirees, investors and the U.S.-born descendants of migrants from the region. The statistics show that in 2014 9373 migrants entered the territory of Mexico from the United States (OECD Stat, 2014). This number exceeds nearly three times that of migrants from Guatemala (2640 individuals), the biggest immigrant group from Central America (OECD Stat, 2014). Leisure migration is visible in the country even without statistical data, since – mostly Canadian – leisure migrant communities build and own resorts, small villages by the seaside, for instance in Bahía Salchi and Huatulco, Oaxaca or in Barra de Navidad, Jalisco. As the example demonstrates, lifestyle migration is “driven by consumption and is optional and voluntary, privileging cultural imaginings of destinations and mobilities” (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014, cited in Benson, 2015, p. 10)

The colonial cities of Central Mexico, such as Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, or San Miguel de Allende have a great touristic importance as well regarding leisure migration. Numerous people from developed countries rent or exchange houses in these cities; move there permanently or for the cold months of the year. Since leisure migration is highly intertwined with consumption and with a relatively affluent, “privileged” status of migrants, its contribution to the economic, social growth of the destination country is significant. (Benson, 2015, p. 10)

3.3.2 New irregular migration flows

As for the irregular migrants from Asian and African countries, they usually use the same routes as migrants from the region and hire *coyotes* for their trip to the United States. First, they enter one of the South or Central American countries – probably a country that

they can enter without having a visa - and join the migration flows northward in the direction of the United States. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017) In most cases, these migrants have the same intentions: they cross the region with the aim to have a new life in the U.S. However, nowadays due to the increased border control and restriction regimes, more and more often they flee back to Mexico, causing a humanitarian crisis in the border cities of the northern Mexican states (Pfeiffer, 2016). Gómez (2017), referring to the Observatorio Nacional de la Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano (CEM) states: “the migration flow to the Northern border is changing since the migration routes are changing too.”

Not only African and Asian migrants contribute to the current, pressing situation in the border cities: According to the calculations of the Catholic Church, the shelters receive migrants “primarily from Haiti, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Cuba, and also from Europe and Asia to a smaller extent” (Gómez, 2017).

Following the earthquake in Haiti in 2010, and the more recent hurricane Matthew in 2016, thousands of Haitians left their country seeking security and better opportunities. The majority first fled to Brazil, however after the Brazilian economic crises they continued their journey to the United States. (González, 2016) In those times, concerning the situation in Haiti, the United States suspended the deportations of Haitians. However, after a few months, by the time the masses of Haitian migrants arrived to Mexico, the U.S. government had resumed deporting irregular migrants. Thereby, thousands of Haitian migrants accumulated in the border cities of Mexico, mostly in Mexicali and Tijuana, pondering whether to settle down in Mexico or hope for more favourable conditions for crossing to the United States (González, 2016).

As an evidence of the seriousness of the issue: Mexican news sources counted with an estimated 7,000 Haitian migrants in the border cities (González, 2016) in December 2016; however, they reported recently 20,000 migrants in the city of Tijuana alone; 90% of them from the Caribbean region (Muedano, 2017). The core of the humanitarian crisis is that the shelters have no capacity to receive such a large number of persons. Together with the Mexican migrant groups, as the Catholic Church reports, shelters in the border

area in high season (between April to December) receive from 25 up to more than 300 persons a day (Gómez, 2017).

What is more, in Tijuana the Haitian migrants have already started building houses for their new community that will be called “*La Pequeña Haiti*” – The Little Haiti. The community received a donation of empty territory in the zone called Cañón del Alacrán, where they are organizing their new, Mexican life, with the support of a local Christian church. (Pérez, 2017)

The reports of online newspapers also describe that – for instance in the city of Tijuana – the composition of the population is becoming more and more diverse due to the immigration of different nationalities, such as Chinese, German, Italian and Russian ethnic groups (Muedano, 2017). Statistics also show that between the years of 2002 and 2010 98 different nationalities applied for asylum in Mexico (Talsma, 2012, p. 7). In many cases, the reasons why these migrants choose to settle down in Mexican border areas are the impossibility of emigration to the United States or the failure of having a „good life” in the U.S. In the case of the North Korean family living in Nogales, Sonora observed by Josh Morgan (2014), an unsuccessful attempt to open a family business in the United States brought them to the other side of the border. As Morgan notes (2014), in Nogales, Sonora there is an already existing Korean (business) community consisted of forty families.

3.4 Migration Governance in Mexico

Regarding the legislation of migration in Mexico, in 2000 the country joined the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (UNHCR, 2000, p. 438). It also ratified and implemented in 2003 the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their Families (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 3) and implemented the Law on Refugees and Complementary Protection (*Ley de Refugiados y Protección Complementaria*) (Dicker & Mansfield, 2012, p. 7). In 2012 Mexico enacted a new law against human trafficking, the Law on Preventing and Sanctioning Trafficking in Persons

(*Ley para Prevenir y Sancionar la Trata de Personas*), which established the institution of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes of Violence Against Women and Trafficking in Persons. Furthermore, Mexico plays a key role in regional migration management, such as in the Regional Conference on Migration or in the Puebla-Panama Plan and participates in the Global Forum on Migration and Development. (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, p. 44)

Migration issues in Mexico are coordinated at the federal level by the Subsecretariat of Population, Migration and Religious Affairs (*Subsecretaría de Población, Migración y Asuntos Religiosos*). The National Migration Institute (*Instituto Nacional de Migración – INM*), under the Secretariat of the Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB*), plays a leading role in the supervision of migration, the implementation of new legislation and in the realization of programs (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, p. 44). Repatriations and deportations, however, are delegated to the Migration Control and Verification Coordination and the INM Regional Delegations (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 6). The issues of refugees and asylum claims belong under the operation of the Mexican Commission for Refugees Assistance (*Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados – COMAR*).

3.4.1 Ley de Migración

As for the law on migration, until 2011 Mexico had no distinct legislation regarding the question. The issue of migration was dealt with under the federal General Population Law (*Ley General de Población*) from 1974. However, after the tragic events of two massacres in 2010 and 2011, when in total 268 migrants were killed in San Fernando, Tamaulipas by the drug cartel Los Zetas (París et al., 2015, p. 21), the history of migration issues in Mexico came to a turning point: in May 2011, the Mexican Congress approved and enacted the new migration law, the *Ley de Migración* (Alba, 2013).

As a brief summary, the new Mexican migration law emphasizes above all the promotion of family unity and the protection of human rights of the migrants and all foreigners in the territory of Mexico promising special attention and increased protection for the most

vulnerable: children, pregnant women, elderly people and so on. The law also proposes serious castigation for those who act against its dispositions, highlighting the obligations of border officers and other official personnel of the authorities. The *Ley de Migración* bans all the utilitarian activities related to migration such as smuggling or hosting undocumented migrants.

*“Imposes penalty of eight to sixteen years in prison and a fine of five thousand to fifteen thousand days of minimum salary to those who: I. With the purpose of trafficking helps one or more persons to enter another country without adequate documentation, with the aim of obtaining directly or indirectly profit” (...) “III. Host or transport to the national territory one or various numbers of foreigners with the intention to avoid migration control...”*¹² (Ley de Migración, 2016, p. 42).

Furthermore, it declares that under no circumstances is discrimination permissible; the migrants must be treated equally in every situation: *“Unrestricted respect of human rights of migrants, nationals and foreigners, whatever their origins, nationality, gender, ethnicity, age and migrant status are, with special attention on the most vulnerable such as minors, women, indigenous people, adolescents and the elderly, as well as the victims of crime”*¹³ (Ley de Migración, 2016, p. 2).

Regarding the protection of migrant rights, it is important to highlight that the *Ley de Migración* includes a special type of visa for those who need protection for humanitarian reasons. The visa category of *Visitante por Razones Humanitarias* (Visitor for humanitarian reasons) grant the right to stay and work in the country for those who “are

¹² Originally: „Se impondrá pena de ocho a dieciséis años de prisión y multa de cinco mil a quince mil días de salario mínimo general vigente en el Distrito Federal, a quien: I. Con propósito de tráfico lleve a una o más personas a internarse en otro país sin la documentación correspondiente, con objeto de obtener directa o indirectamente un lucro, o (...) III. Albergue o transporte por el territorio nacional, con el objeto de obtener directa o indirectamente un lucro, a uno o varios extranjeros con el fin de evadir la revisión migratoria.”

¹³ Originally: „Respeto irrestricto de los derechos humanos de los migrantes, nacionales y extranjeros, sea cual fuere su origen, nacionalidad, género, etnia, edad y situación migratoria, con especial atención a grupos vulnerables como menores de edad, mujeres, indígenas, adolescentes y personas de la tercera edad, así como a víctimas del delito.”

offended, victims or witnesses of crimes committed in national territory”¹⁴ (Ley de Migración, 2016, p. 18). However, the humanitarian visa has a time limitation: it is valid until the end of the procedure and after that the immigrant is obligated to either leave the country or apply for a different type of residence permit. (Ley de Migración, 2016, p. 18) According to the findings of the NGO Sin Fronteras, although this type of visa should apply, for instance, to Central American migrants as well, it was so far only granted to Haitians who fled their country after the earthquake in 2010 (Talsma, 2012, p. 25).

The further criticism of the *Ley de Migración* and the institutional framework of migration in Mexico will be elaborated on in the 5.4 *Legal considerations* chapter of the research.

¹⁴ Originally: „Se autorizará esta condición de estancia a los extranjeros que se encuentren en cualquiera de los siguientes supuestos: a) ser ofendido, víctima o testigo de algún delito cometido en territorio nacional.”

4. Methodology

In the chapter dealing with the methodology of my thesis I provide a clear description on the methods I used, the data I gathered and on the way the research was conducted. I also elaborate on the difficulties I faced during the research process, and the risks for researchers in Mexico. Moreover, I discuss the question of research ethics and the psychology of migration, since it is a sensitive topic not only in Mexico but all over the world. Finally, through a detailed explanation on the methodology it becomes clear that in the end of the research I came to a somewhat different conclusion than what I had expected in the beginning. Consequently the enlargement of the research topic became necessary.

As the 3. *Background and the main components of the problem* chapter demonstrates, the research topic includes many intertwined aspects that must be analyzed in order to get an over-all view on migration issues in the region that makes the research more complicated regarding its methodological basis. For this reason I decided to use a sociological approach: a mixed methodology that includes semi-structured interviews, a survey and personal observations with the intention to cover these related aspects as much as possible.

In spite of the difficulties I met on the field I decided to use various methods to gather data for the following reasons: As *Migration in an Era of Restriction and Recession* by Leal and Rodríguez (2016) emphasizes we are entering a new era, where the “traditional” problematics of migration is increasingly evolving from a regional phenomenon into a real global challenge. Therefore, an over-all, complex approach and methodology might be necessary when discussing transnational or global issues; as it is the intention in the present qualitative research as well. This mixed approach uncovers elements such as the constant changing nature of the phenomenon of migration. The dynamics of this constant change – on local, regional, and global level – are clearly observable through the changing patterns of migration flows or through the appearance of new roles in

migration, for instance when traditionally sending countries become receivers of thousands of immigrants.

Therefore, as the methodological framework of my research, I interviewed experts on the topic, Mexicans with working experience in migration, as well as regular and unauthorized immigrants in the country. In addition I created and spread a survey with the technic of snowball sampling on the situation of migration in Mexico, possibly targeting different groups of the society to know more about their opinion on the issues related to migration that could complete the findings of my research. I also spent almost one year living in Puebla, Mexico. During this period I formally and informally talked with many people about my research topic and I made observations regarding the general attitude of Mexicans towards immigrants – including myself. To facilitate my research and to be able to deeply understand the everyday life of Mexicans, during the year in Puebla I was taking intensive, advanced Spanish lessons in an academic environment. Furthermore, through the research process I gained knowledge about how difficult it is to officially gather information on these sensitive topics.

In addition, I must mention that originally I planned doing a field research: working as a volunteer in a migrant shelter. After trying to contact the shelter *Centro de Orientación del Migrante de Oaxaca, A.C. (COMI)* for almost half a year without getting any useful answer, I tried to find information about other shelters as well. In the end – unfortunately – doing a field research turned out to be impossible. However in the very end of my visit to Mexico I managed to briefly talk with the migrants currently staying in the shelter. In the present chapter I explain the difficulties I faced during organizing the research and the dangers that migrant shelters face or could mean for those who work there. About the process of organizing the field research and the interviews: I was taking notes in my research diary almost on a daily basis to be able to record and present how complicated it was.

4.1 Dangers and difficulties

Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries for anyone who is officially trying to investigate on sensitive topics that include the strong presence and influence of criminal organizations in the country. The topic of the research – the characteristics and problematics of migration in the region – belongs to this category. As Shirk (2011) states “... the murder and disappearances of sixty-seven reporters over the past decade have sent a chilling message to the media – the eyes, ears, and voice of civil society – and have made Mexico one of the world’s most dangerous places for journalists” (p. 8). Unfortunately it applies to researchers and activists as well, regardless of their nationality.

I personally rarely felt like I was risking my physical integrity, however at some point I had to seriously consider the potential risks of the research. What is more, in most cases I had to grant the anonymity of the interviewees since they might be exposed to great danger talking about the issues covered in the present research openly, publically and frankly.

A general sense of fear was observable every time I interviewed Mexicans in a public environment regardless of their profession and status relating to migration. They did not mind talking about the topics I brought up and always answered all my questions, although they preferred talking cautiously when discussing these topics in Spanish. They were significantly “braver” when we changed to English, since the majority of Mexicans does not, or not on an advanced level, speak English¹⁵. As Allmark, P. J., Boote, J., Chambers, E., Clarke, A., McDonnell, A., Thompson, A., and Todd, A. (2009) state this is a typical obstacle of conducting interviews on sensitive topics that interviewees might be afraid of other people listening to the recorded interviews or conversations on a public place (p. 9). For this reason when I felt the hesitation of the interviewee I rather did not record the conversation.

¹⁵ Depending on the person, his/her language skills and his/her preferences, I either interviewed the Mexicans in English or in Spanish. When talking in English was surely not a problem for them, I asked them to rather discuss my research topic in English since to me it was easier to properly conduct the interview that way.

The most close-to-danger situation during the research process was making a decision whether I should go or not to work as a volunteer in the migrant shelter *Hermanos en el Camino* in Ixtepec, Oaxaca. *Hermanos en el Camino* is one of the biggest migrant shelters in Mexico. It was founded by Father José Alejandro Solalinde Guerra who fights for the protection of migrants and their human rights in Mexico and on international forums. The migrant shelter *Hermanos en el Camino* is located in a territory where the migration routes cross: the migrants enter Mexico crossing the southern border with Guatemala and arrive to the states of Chiapas or Tabasco. From here they usually go to Arriaga, Chiapas where the railway of the freight train “La Bestia” starts. The zone between Arriaga and Ixtepec is considered to be a highly dangerous area of trafficking in humans. Those who survive the journey arrive to Ixtepec where the migrant shelter provides them protection, accommodation, food and drinks. (Vice, 2013) They also register the migrants to give them some kind of identification document. The founder of the shelter, Father Solalinde is a target of many criminal actors, therefore is exposed to great danger. In order to keep him safe, in the state of Oaxaca he receives governmental protection (A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017). For the same reason, his location is usually confidential; it is extremely difficult to find or contact him.

I could have had the opportunity to spend a few weeks in the shelter of *Hermanos en el Camino*, however after a long dilemma I considered it too risky and decided not to go there. I talked to some people who had been there several times and knew the conditions of the shelter well. Some of them clearly stated that the field research there would involve high risks to me since: on the one hand, I obviously look foreign; with my physical appearance (young, blond, short, weak girl) I would attract unwanted attention. The migrants would probably consider me American that would further worsen my situation. On the other hand, according to my sources the *coyotes* are always among the migrants and since I am not familiar with their typical characteristics, behaviour, I could not recognise them. Those who work with migrants for years learn how to identify the smugglers, but a student like me would not have any chance to detect them; that could have led me to false conclusions and unnecessary risks. Additionally, they also told me that the area itself is dangerous and the shelter is located far from the city of Ixtepec.

Although some of my contacts believed it would have not been risky to go there, finally I decided to follow the advice of those who considered it dangerous in order to avoid the unnecessary risks.

In the meantime, since January I was trying to contact the migrant shelter *Centro de Orientación del Migrante de Oaxaca, A.C.* located in the City of Oaxaca. I also tried to get information about a third shelter in Oaxaca with the help of my personal contacts. Since it was impossible to find out the exact location of the third shelter and therefore I was unable to contact them, I tried to follow my original plan and look for a volunteer job in COMI.

Compared to *Hermanos en el Camino*, COMI is significantly smaller, less dangerous place and has more women working there. Probably the groups of migrants that stop in the City of Oaxaca are also less diverse. I preferred volunteering in COMI from the very beginning of the research since I have personal acquaintances in Oaxaca and due to the safe and easy-to-reach location of the shelter. Coming from a European society beforehand I assumed it would be an easy job to volunteer in a migrant shelter, since these shelters are based on volunteer work. I also expected them to be more willing to get some international attention since their problems are greatly underrepresented on the international scene. In the end, however, it turned out to be impossible to spend even a few days working in the shelter of COMI. In order to demonstrate the stalling of the process and finally the impossibility of going there, here is a brief summary of my research diary:

10th of March: "I sent an email to COMI in January, however I have not got any answer yet, they are also inactive on Facebook. On the 8th of March my contact who was helping me personally delivered my letter – the same as I sent them via email – and my CV to COMI. She said the interview was pending and she will contact me as soon as she has news." On the 27th of March I noted that my contact went back to COMI and talked with a lady who promised to confirm my request soon. On the 21st of April I still did not have any answer from COMI; my contact talked with them again and I re-sent the email since

they asked me to do that. They promised to give an answer next Monday (on the 24th of April), however they did not call, neither replied to my email. The same happened on the 27th of April, they promised to contact me the next day.

Due to the deadline of the thesis it became impossible to do the field research, therefore I gave up trying to volunteer in COMI and decided to focus on the interviews. However, in the very end I had the chance at least to talk with the group of migrants currently living in COMI. They answered my questions frankly and openly. A few days after my visit, according to news reports the shelter of COMI was closed following a violent incident in the migrant shelter of Chauites, Oaxaca. Supposedly the reason of closing COMI – though it was not clear – was to protect the migrants who might be in danger. (Vélez, 2017)

4.2 Ethics and the psychology of migration

In connection to the interviews: it was my priority to respect the research ethics, the human rights of the interviewees and to assure all participants of the research process that I was handling the information they shared confidentially in order to guarantee their safety. As already stated, the biggest obstacle of the research was the sensitive and risky character of the topic, since most of the people were afraid of the potential negative consequences of publicly sharing their opinion. “Phenomena that deal with potential fear of stigmatization [...] and studies that may reveal information of a politically sensitive nature” (Barnard, Gerber & McCosker, 2011) are considered sensitive topics. Especially in the case of migrants from the shelter of COMI was it crucial to make them understand who I am, and what the purposes of the research are since they belong to the category of “vulnerable population”: These people are usually greatly traumatized, therefore they need special attention and a highly confidential, as friendly as possible atmosphere. (Barnard et al., 2011)

Migration is exhausting in itself both physically and mentally, let alone the abuses, increased difficulties that migrants face in the region. As Hautzinger et al. (2014) note

“the individuals experience the loss of their roots, their comfort zone when they find themselves in a partially or completely different cultural context. This might lead to the feeling of insecurity, the loss of autonomy, intimacy that can cause serious problems in their communication skills and adaptive strategies” (p. 69). These side effects create a crisis situation in the life of the migrant. Hautzinger et al. (2014) describes the stages of the migration crisis as follows:

1) *conformity stage* – the individuals favour the culture of the receiving country against that of their own country of origin; they adapt to it and accept it. 2) *dissonance stage* – it appears when the individuals experience something controversial to their own culture. They start having doubts and feel less secure in the new country. 3) *resistance and immersion stage* – the individuals accept their own culture and doubt the culture of the receiving country. 4) *introspection stage* – the individuals try to define themselves as part of their original culture, they discover and re-build their identity. 5) *integrative awareness stage* – in this final stage the individuals are capable of seeing the advantages and disadvantages of both their own culture, and the culture of the host country. This is the stage of understanding, acceptance and adaptation; it is characterized by the feeling of security. (p. 70)

During these five stages – and even after – the migrants might face great physical and mental difficulties such as depression, frequent headaches, the sense of loss, insecurity, low self-confidence, physical diseases and even suicidal thoughts. The process of adaptation and integration can last for decades through the lives of more generations. As a reaction, unconscious seek for a “solution” for these difficulties one can observe antisocial behaviour, anger and aggression, and the like. (Hautzinger et al., 2014, 75) In the case of traumatized migrants who went through extreme difficulties we also need to bear in mind the possibility of posttraumatic stress disorder that requires further special attention from the part of the researcher. According to Gilligan (2009) some experts believe the posttraumatic stress disorder might be present due to the victim’s inability to integrate the traumatic memories “into a framework of meaning, or of their integration into a framework which expects a traumatized response” (p. 124).

Capps et al. (in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016) describe the traumas and difficulties of those migrants whose family members were deported. They emphasize the following difficulties: lack of income due to the loss of employment, lack of food, stigmatization, constant fear of being arrested and/or deported, housing problems, mental and physical health problems such as insomnia, sickness, suicidal thoughts. (pp. 79-87). Bracken, Giller & Summerfield (1995 cited in Gilligan, 2009), in addition, emphasize that the “symptoms, diagnosis and treatments are cultural specific” (p. 121), they might differ in Eastern and Western cultures.

For these reasons, it was essential to be aware of the mental and physical state of the people I worked with – especially in the case of irregular migrants – and formulate the interviews/discussions accordingly as it is recommended for researchers investigating sensitive topics (Allmark, et al., 2009, p. 11). In every case I kept in mind the respect of the two core ethical principles noted in the study of Fujii (2012) referring to the Belmont Report of 1979 and to the IRB Guidebook of 1993:

- 1.) “*Respect for persons*”: which includes the general respectful attitude of the researcher towards the subjects of the research, and also that the individuals under study must be fully informed and must participate voluntarily in the research process (p. 718).
- 2.) “*Beneficence*”: “The researcher’s duty to maximize benefits and minimize harm” (p. 718). This dimension of ethical issues includes the study subjects’ rights to privacy and confidentiality.

During the whole research my main ethical objective was to minimize harm, since I know how destructive a single question can be for those who went through great traumas. In the migrant shelter of COMI the knowledge on research ethics and the psychology of migration turned out to be crucial in practice:

First of all, initially none of the migrants wanted to talk, I could observe how scared they were. Finally the person who let me in the shelter broke the ice by starting to talk. I would like to emphasize this moment once again since it highlights the main

problematics of the research; the ethical and psychological core of it: even after explaining many times my objectives, who I am and emphasizing that I only need information and that I guarantee their anonymity, they were still extremely afraid to talk. However after a while, the person who let me in understood what I was talking about; and agreed to have a conversation under the reservation not to ask anything compromising and not to collect the personal data of the migrants. After he started to talk the others started to talk as well. At the end they asked me again who I was – even though I had explained it in the very beginning of my visit – and when they understood that my studies, the programme of Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research focuses on helping people in conflicts and on the creation, rebuilding of peace, they unexpectedly thanked me for trying to help them and for investigating on their problems.

During our talk, one could observe strong emotions on their faces such as anger and anxiety. Even though I could not gather the story of all the thirty people there, the stories of those six migrants who openly talked with me were shocking. One of them, a 23 year-old boy lost his whole family: they were killed by the *maras* in his country, Honduras. That is why he decided to flee.

As his story demonstrates it was crucial to be prepared mentally, to have proper knowledge on the emotional state of these people who are highly traumatized and face great difficulties, especially since there might be “an immediate and/or delayed impact on the mental health” in the case of participants of a “sensitive research” (Barnard et al., 2011).

4.3 Interviews

As the main data gathering method of my research I interviewed various people who represent different actors in migration issues: migrants themselves – authorized and unauthorized both –, Mexicans who had working experience with migrants and experts on the topic. The questions of the semi-structured interviews were exclusively prepared to each interviewee; therefore for every interview I restructured and changed the questions to suit the status of the interviewee. In one case, however I could not prepare

for the interview since it was spontaneously organized. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, English or Hungarian depending on the preferences of the persons interviewed. Before the interviews I always informed the interviewees about the objectives of the research, explained the research ethics and offered anonymity. Anonymity turned out to be the key to most of the interviews since migration is a very sensitive topic in Mexico, from both the Mexican and the migrant side people are generally afraid of its potential negative consequences.

In most cases the interviewees allowed me to record the conversations. In some cases, however, I decided to take only notes, since I felt that the interviewee was hesitating and it was necessary to create a situation as natural as possible. During the interviews I completely followed the requests and preferences of the interviewees and improvised, changed the order and the phrasing of questions accordingly – as it is permitted and necessary in the case of semi-structured interviews. (Allmark et al., 2009, p. 11)

As Richards and Schwartz (2002 cited in Allmark et al., 2009) state it is recommended to use “pseudonyms and initials and, where possible, that the researcher change other identifying details in reports” (p. 11). Since most of the interviewees preferred anonymity, I changed their names to respect their rights. In some cases, even though the interviewees did not ask for anonymity directly, I found it safer not to mention their real names.

From the seven interviewees four did not ask for remaining anonym.

Dr. Parastoo Anita Mesri Hashemi-Dilmaghani, an Iranian lawyer and American citizen who has been living in Mexico for years allowed me to publically use the information she provided to me during the personal interview conducted with her on the 11th of April, 2017 in Mexico City. She currently lives in Mexico City researching the rights of indigenous peoples in Mexico, however also spent a long time living in Oaxaca.

Mauricio Fuentes, a Mexican citizen from Tapachula, Chiapas also allowed me to use his name and all the information he shared with me. He has numerous personal

experiences with migrants since Tapachula, his hometown, is one of the cities where migrants pass by on their way from the Guatemalan border to the north. Fuentes currently lives in Puebla and personally discussed my research topic with me on the 27th of April, 2017 there.

José Alejandro Cálix, Salvadoran citizen from an affluent, educated family who came to Mexico to study shared his opinion on migration issues with me via a video call on the 4th of May, 2017. He currently lives in Mexico City. His father worked as ambassador, then as consul in Mexico, therefore he represents the side of authorized, “privileged” Central American migrants who are usually highly underrepresented in studies on Central American migration.

The fourth person who did not ask for anonymity, although in my opinion it is necessary in his case is **Omar R.**, an undocumented migrant from El Salvador currently staying in the shelter *Hermanos en el Camino* in Ixtepec, Oaxaca. Since he was obviously afraid of getting in contact with Mexican authorities and stressed over talking with me, I decided not to publish his full name. I had the chance to talk with him during my stay in the city of Oaxaca, on the 2nd of May, 2017 via video call.

By contrast, in the case of **Maria** and **José** who are Mexican citizens and had been working as migration officials for years, I had to change their names in order to guarantee their safety and anonymity as they wished. I interviewed both of them personally in the city of Oaxaca, on the 2nd (Maria) and the 3rd of May, 2017 (José).

Similarly I refer to a high-ranking Hungarian diplomat working on the Hungarian-Mexican relations as **Zoltán** with whom I had a personal conversation on the 11th of April, 2017 in Mexico City.

I also had the opportunity to visit and have a group discussion with the migrants currently staying in the shelter *Centro de Orientación del Migrantes de Oaxaca, A.C.* on the 2nd of May, 2017. Although there were 30 people staying there only 6 of them decided to share

their personal experiences with me. In their case I did not ask for names or any specific personal data, since they were afraid of detention and of any kind of public attention. Therefore, here I only list some general information about those migrants who answered my questions:

- **Migrant 1:** from El Salvador, over 30 years-old, came to Mexico alone
- **Migrant 2:** from Guatemala, over 40 years-old, came to Mexico alone
- **Migrant 3:** from El Salvador, over 40 year-old, came with his son
- **Migrant 4:** from Honduras, less than 30 years-old, came alone to Mexico
- **Migrant 5:** from Guatemala, around 70 years-old, is alone in Mexico
- **Migrant 6:** from El Salvador, over 40 years-old, came alone to Mexico

Since all the migrants in the shelter appeared to see me, I could ask them to provide me statistical data; they did not have any problem with that. I counted the different nationalities, the rate of men and women and the age groups in general. As stated in the list above, six of them voluntarily answered my questions and talked about their experiences.

The statistical data I could gather follows:

- 5 women, 22 men and 3 children (30 persons in total)
- 13 people from El Salvador, 9 from Guatemala, 7 from Honduras and 1 from the United States
 - Most women were from Honduras

The age groups were formulated as:

Under the age of 20:	3 persons
Between the age of 20 and 30:	13 persons
Between the age of 30 and 40:	13 persons
Over the age of 40:	1 person

The one person from the United States was a woman apparently having a mental illness. According to the information gathered during the interviews it is common that people with mental illnesses and drug addicts become deported (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017).

4.4 Survey

As an additional data gathering method a survey was randomly spread online – with the so-called non-discriminative snowball sampling¹⁶. The survey contained open, limitless questions about general, broad topics, and two rating scales. The objectives of the survey were to gather information on the general opinion of Mexicans about issues related to migration in order to tone, further orient the results of the research. For these reasons the survey purposefully contained general questions on broad topics that are not easy to analyse with the usual quantitative methods. I purposefully chose to use open question since my aim was to receive additional qualitative data on my findings. Furthermore, I intended to collect more personal stories, experiences on migration. May I refer here to the fact that I intended to follow a qualitative, epistemic approach giving me the possibility to gain a more personal and comprehensive picture on migration issues in Mexico. In order to reach these aims – in my opinion – open questions that require long, personal answers were the most suitable.

The survey was almost purely qualitative, however it contained two rating scale-type questions as well. One of these questions measured the extent to what Mexicans find the authorities, police and the security forces correct, reliable and transparent. The ratings on a 1 to 5 scale were labelled as the following: 1) I do not trust them, I am rather afraid of them 2) they are not reliable, I simply do not trust them 3) in certain cases they are reliable 4) in most cases they are reliable, generally I trust them 5) they are always reliable, I trust them. The second rating-type question investigated on how tolerant, accepting the Mexican society is towards immigrants; the potential answers were 1) not

¹⁶ In the case of non-discriminative snowball sampling the participants of the research recruit further participants: it is the technic when the „members of the sample group are recruited via chain referral” with no limitations regarding the potential participants (Dudovskiy, 2016)

at all 2) it tolerates the presence of immigrants but does not favour it 3) neutral 4) mostly tolerant 5) very tolerant and supports immigration to Mexico.

I should stress here once again that I intended to carry out a qualitative, epistemic style research. The survey distributed via Google-survey was not to obtain a representative sample. Though it proved to be very useful to further shade the picture.

13 people answered the survey, 7 men and 6 women. Most of the respondents are in their twenties, one respondent belongs to the age category above 30 and two to the age group above 50. Therefore the results mainly represent the opinion of the current young adult generation. The majority of the respondents are from the state of Tabasco, others from Puebla, Mexico City DF., Yucatán, Campeche and Oaxaca. Some of the respondents only wrote “Mexico” or the state where they currently live instead of their place of origins. They all responded to all the questions, usually in longer – two-three-sentence answers. In a few cases, however, they responded with only one word. The final question “*Do you or your family have any experiences related to migration that might be interesting regarding the research?*” was the most elusive, most people gave a negative answer, only two of the respondents noted personal experiences.

Although the number of responds I received is small, I believe the survey was successful and reached its objectives of further shading the findings of the research. The results of the survey are elaborated on in the 5.4 *Results* of the survey chapter.

5. Findings

In this chapter of the thesis I present and analyze the findings of my research. In order to provide a logical, clear and easy to understand structure, I discuss the distinct topics of the findings in different thematical sections. Each section aims at answering one of the main questions listed in the *2.1 Structure of the research* chapter with the final objective of giving an answer to the research question: *What might be the main factors that contribute to Mexico's transition from a traditional sending country to a destination country of migrants?* The summary of the findings and the final conclusions of the research – as well as the potential answers for the research question – are elaborated on in the *6. Final notes* chapter of the thesis.

I believe discussing the findings of the research grouped around the three main questions is the most suitable structure for the topic since it allows me to follow my original goal: give a comprehensive, value-oriented overview on the migration-related issues. On the other hand, this way of editing suits better my discursive, epistemic approach. At the same time concentrating the information gathered from the interviews, the survey, personal observations and the academic literature allows me to confront the ideas, the theories. A structure that contains the findings of the different data gathering methods separately would dissolve the logical flow of information and therefore would hinder the intention of providing a comprehensive knowledge on the topic of the thesis.

Consequently, the present chapter is structured as the following: the first three sub-chapters investigate the answers for the three main questions of the research. The last subchapter, *5.4 Legal considerations*, concentrates on the critiques and the possible solutions for the problems of the political-institutional framework of migration both in Mexico and the region. It also sheds light on the advantages and difficulties Mexico face – or would face – as a new destination country of migrants.

5.1 What are the dangers, risks the migrants face and how do they affect the “success” of migration?

First of all, the interviews with regular and irregular migrants as well as with experts on migration issues led to the following patterns of migration flows:

The majority of the migrants who enter the territory of Mexico are on their way since the situation in their home country is difficult and dangerous, therefore they technically move forcibly (A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017). They usually flee from their country due to the extreme level of crime and violence and due to the high unemployment rate (Omar R., video interview, May 2, 2017; J. A. Cálix, video interview, May 4, 2017; Migrants in COMI, group discussion, May 2, 2017). Even those who come from a significantly more “privileged” background, such as José Alejandro Cálix (video interview, May 4, 2017), often decide to leave for the reason of lack of opportunities.

Crossing the southern border of Mexico with Guatemala is easy since there are only a few official border control points. The migrants cross by the Suchiate river on boats made of large-sized tires. (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017; Vice, 2013) For crossing the river migrants have to pay 10 quetzals – equal to 1.8 dollars. (Vice, 2013). Even though Central Americans are allowed to stay in Mexico for a certain period of time without a visa, since they are not familiar with the law and they enter the country mainly illegally, they must pay a high price – mainly to corrupt officials, criminal groups and smugglers – for the free pass. As J. A. Cálix (video interview, May 4, 2017) stated, in the Central American countries undocumented migrants barely have problems: the authorities let them pass since they are part of the “Central American Federation”¹⁷. Their hardships start when they arrive to the border with Mexico.

As the sample of migrants I contacted shows, they usually migrate alone, without any preparation and most of them belong to the age group between 20-40; the rate of minors and the elderly is significantly smaller.

¹⁷ Central American Federation as a political entity does not exist. Cálix (video interview, May 4, 2017) referred to the cooperation and close ties between Central American countries.

Their goal in every case is finding a better, stable life, security and more opportunities: the so-called “American dream.” Therefore, they intend to settle down in the United States or Canada (José, personal interview, May 3, 2017; Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017; A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017). Most of them come from Central American countries: the largest number from Guatemala, on the second place from El Salvador and finally from Honduras. In recent years the influx of other ethnicities from Africa and Asia, as well as the number of Cubans, Venezuelans and Argentinians sharply increased as well (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017; José, personal interview, May 3, 2017; Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017). The statistical data gathered in COMI roughly follows this pattern, however there I counted more Salvadorans (13 persons) than Guatemalans (9 persons). Though the composition of the group in COMI represents the usual characteristics of migrants from the above-mentioned countries:

As Maria (personal interview, May 2, 2017) told me, Salvadorans are usually the most traumatized, most “hostile” due to all the horror they suffered. Guatemalans are usually very calm and friendly people, they prefer working in the markets of Mexico. Having a conversation in the circle of migrants in COMI I had the impression – judging by the behavior, facial expression of my counterparts – that this assessment was correct, however all the migrants were helping and were open towards me. Although I personally found the Guatemalans (Migrant 2 and Migrant 6) the most talkative, most friendly: they were the ones who thanked me at the end for dealing with their problems, furthermore they invited me back to the shelter in case I need more information.

Maria (personal interview, May 2, 2017) also stated that the rate of women who migrate is significantly higher in the case of Hondurans. My findings support this information since three out of the five women in the shelter were Hondurans.

According to the narrations of the migrants, they have no network or family members who would help them, however they do receive help from the church – via the shelters. Their declarations about the migrant shelter – both COMI and *Hermanos en el Camino* –

were completely positive and full of appreciation. Some of them had no major difficulties on their way to Mexico (Omar, R., video interview, May 2, 2017; Migrants in COMI, group discussion, May 2, 2017), although they all heard about the abuses, kidnappings, and killings in the region. The migrants in COMI highlighted theft (Migrant 3 who came to Mexico with his son noted that all the cloths of his son got stolen on their way), the detention centers and money they have to pay along their journey as the major obstacles. According to the migrants in COMI between Chiapas and the City of Oaxaca there are fifteen detention centers, although Maria (personal interview, May 2, 2017) estimates less, approximately three or four.

As for the transportations the migrants use, those from COMI only partially traveled by the train “La Bestia” or on foot, every time it was possible they used a “combi” – a kind of van – or buses (Migrants in COMI, group discussion, May 2, 2017) which corresponds to the analysis of the IOM’s Global Migration Data Analysis Center (2016): the Mexican Programa Frontera Sur of 2014 led to a drop in the frequency of using the train and in the number of train-related deaths; although it also increased the reliance of Central American migrants on smugglers and other criminal groups since it cut the access to the train (GMDAC, 2016, p. 6). The information gathered from Maria (personal interview, May 2, 2017) also supports this finding. According to París et al. (2015), those who still use the train are the migrants with the most limited financial resources – mostly Hondurans. The majority nowadays hire a *coyote* that takes them to the U.S. by buses or trucks. Only one out of four migrants decides to travel mostly on foot (although this rate is 53% in the case of Salvadorans). (p. 25)

The migrants in COMI (group discussion, May 2, 2017), however stated that they did not come to Mexico with the help of *polleros*¹⁸. According to them “those who can afford to hire *polleros* arrive to their destination without bigger problems and do not end up in a migrant shelter” (Migrant 2 of Migrants in COMI, group discussion, May 2, 2017). Fuentes (personal interview, April 27, 2017) also stated: with money everything is possible, even buying the protection of the criminal organizations.

¹⁸ Smugglers, *coyotes*

In some cases, since the criminal groups and the *coyotes* work together, the *coyotes* give a “key” to the migrants in order to ensure their free passage through the territory of the cartels: “in Tamaulipas if you show the key that the *coyote* gave you, the Zetas and the *Cártel del Golfo* let you pass. They mention Reynosa and Matamoros most often in this sense” (París et al., p. 20).

In recent years, however, the prices of hiring a *coyote* increased and became dependent on the gender and nationality of the migrants: the prices are significantly higher in the case of women. The reason for the difference in costs concerning the gender is that women use the services of *coyotes* more often. Similarly to the gender dimension, a “guided tour” with a smuggler is a lot more expensive for people from Asia and Africa than for Central Americans. In general they report a 7000 dollars price for a trip from Guatemala to the United States for Central American men and a price up to 9000 dollars for women (París et al., 2015, p. 19). Those migrants who cannot pay the fee are often forced to smuggle drugs (París et al., 2015, p. 26). The study of París et al. (2015) also states: there exists a group called “VIP transmigrants”, who are willing to pay multiple extra price for “comfort and a relative safety” (p. 19).

In addition, the network of *coyotes* recently became that globalized that it even reaches as far away places as China. The greatly expanded networks make smuggling of persons a smoothly functioning, highly profitable business: In every region or country the smuggler in charge takes the migrant to the next territory where he continues his journey with a local *coyote* crossing all the way from Asia with the harmonized cooperation of smugglers until the final destination, the United States. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017)

Many times, however, the *coyotes* are only interested in the money the migrants have, therefore they often rob them or abandon them after receiving the payment. Selling their organs, trafficking women and children or kidnapping their babies and giving them away to European couples are not rare either. (Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017) When I asked the interviewees about the preferences of *coyotes*: whether they treat

Mexicans and Central Americans differently, their answer was either that there is no difference since they are only interested in money (Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017) or that they do favour their own co-nationals, although the money they pay is what really matters (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017; José, personal interview, May 3, 2017).

According to José (personal interview, May 3, 2017) the migrant shelters also make a business out of the migrants, there is a “mafia behind them”, even though they do it more discretely: the fathers and others who run the shelter collaborate with the criminal groups in the area. They register the migrants to be able to easily follow, observe them. As an example José (personal interview, May 3, 2017) highlighted the phone calls the migrants make from the shelters. According to him those who work in the shelter listen to their conversations, therefore they gather information about the amount of money the migrant has or will receive from his/her family. They tell the information to the criminal actors who stop the migrants; in some cases torture or murder them and take their money. (José, personal interview, May 3, 2017) He argued: these shelters do not let the authorities, visitors in, there is no control over them; any kind of “business” can happen inside. (José, personal interview, May 3, 2017) Although, as already stated, the migrants I contacted were satisfied with the work of the shelters and were grateful for the help they receive from them.

Others, such as Mesri (personal interview, April 11, 2017) and Maria (personal interview, May 2, 2017) believe, the shelters are the only actors of the society who can successfully protect the migrants on their way. However, refugees receive significantly more help from organizations such as the United Nations or the UNHCR (ACNUR in Spanish). As to the somewhat controversial issue we should keep in mind that the migrant shelters are independent institutions where the authorities are not permitted to enter, therefore can guarantee the safety and no detention of the migrants. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017) The shelters and in particular the migrants, however, are constant targets of criminal organizations, smugglers, human traffickers, and so on. For this reason most of the shelters try not to call attention by making public statements or appearing on local,

national and international forums. (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017; A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017)

Furthermore, the interviewees noted that the frequency of kidnappings, the level of human trafficking grew ominously in the last few years. They also mentioned the recently introduced restrictive measures in the United States predicting that the masses of migrants stuck in Mexico and the large number of Mexicans returning – voluntarily or forcibly – from the U.S. would cause serious problems. In addition, they stated that the new U.S. policy aimed at reducing the level of unauthorized migration was further worsening the situation of migrants, turning irregular migration an even more risky and inhumane activity. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017; José, personal interview, May 3, 2017)

Considering the reasons of the extreme level of violence in the region: Mexicans and foreigners equally agree that the government, the authorities, the police and all security forces are corrupt and often work together with criminal groups. Therefore, most of the interviewees had the opinion that there would not be real changes in the protection of human and migrant rights in spite of the enhanced fight of the government against organized crime. As A. P. Mesri (personal interview, April 11, 2017) noted, the government has strong ties to criminal organization since they receive a large amount of money from them in exchange for no interference in their activities. According to her, there are theories that every time a president comes to power he signs a pact with one or more of the criminal groups promising them autonomy for money. Thus in spite of the violations of human rights of Mexicans or other nationalities, the government will not take effective measures to reduce the level of violence since it is not in their interest (A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017).

The only actors mentioned during the interviews in favour of the protection of migrants were – as above discussed – the shelters and the civil organizations such as Sin Fronteras, or research centers such as El Colegio de la Frontera Norte or Colegio de México. (A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017) Although José (personal interview, May 3,

2017) believes that civil organizations are primarily motivated to gain popularity and revenue instead of by the intention to help unconditionally; what is more they are lacking knowledge and experiences since they rarely go to the field to observe the real situation of migrants. Hence, the picture is quite mixed concerning the role of non-governmental organizations.

5.2 How difficult is it to settle down and have a life in Mexico; and to what extent does it influence the decisions of migrants about staying in the country?

First of all, it is not difficult for most of the nationalities to enter and stay in Mexico since Mexico does not require a visa (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017) and provides a potential 180 days stay in the country as a tourist. Although having an employment, studying or staying in the country permanently do require a valid visa. (Ley de Migración, 2016)

As for the government's standpoint on migration; Mexico has a double-sided migration policy: the emigration of masses of Mexicans to the United States is dealt with as a priority; however on the other hand, the issue of immigration to the territory of Mexico has no great importance (Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017), what is more the "government limits the rights of foreigners" (González-Murphy & Koslowski, 2011, p. 1). It is due to three reasons: First of all, the issue of Mexicans in the US involves substantial economic considerations as already discussed in the previous chapters: the remittances Mexican migrants send home yearly highly contribute to the economic situation of the country, as well as to the welfare system. However, Escobar and Janssen (2006) state, that the geographical patterns of emigration are not linked to the level of poverty (p. 10).

Secondly, the Mexican migration policy does not favour great extent of immigration to the country. Especially not the immigration of people from less developed countries, such as from Central America. (Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017) In the legislation of migration one can find evidence of possible restrictive measures against

large migration flows, for instance in the *Ley General de Población* (González-Murphy & Koslowski, 2011, p. 4; Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017). Thirdly, the influx of immigrants to the country is not significant compared to the population of Mexico (Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017), especially since only a very small percentage of those who enter the country decide to stay; the majority is in transit towards the United States (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017).

In general the migrants did not note major difficulties in settling down in Mexico, however one of the migrants in COMI (Migrant 1 of Migrants in COMI, group discussion, May 2, 2017) stated that his asylum request was rejected. Most of them in COMI were staying in Mexico without documentation or with a humanitarian visa. Those who are legal immigrants in Mexico, such as Cáliz (video interview, May 4, 2017) and Mesri (personal interview, April 11, 2017) have never experienced difficulties during the official procedures. Although, as Mesri (personal interview, April 11, 2017) noted we must distinguish “privileged” immigrants – those who come of their own free will with an affluent, educated background – from those who decide to leave their country due to coercive factors. For the so-called “leisure migrants” for instance who come from developed countries mostly from the United States and Canada, to a smaller extent from countries such as Switzerland or Italy, Mexico can provide a high quality life without major difficulties. These leisure migrants are usually old aged pensioners who come to Mexico to escape from the colder months in their country or because they have health problems such as asthma or rheumatism. In addition, their currency – usually dollars – is more valuable in Mexico: they can afford buying their own property and the access to private health care. (Benson, 2015, pp. 12-13; González-Murphy & Koslowski, 2011, p. 7; Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017; José, personal interview, May 3, 2017) However, the public insecurity, the presence of criminal groups and corruption in the country might be deterrent factors (Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017).

As already discussed, the high level of corruption is one of the biggest problems in Mexico that affects basically every segment of the everyday life of residents. According to Mesri (personal interview, April 11, 2017) and José (personal interview, May 3, 2017),

there is a general institutional transparency in the country: for instance the information about the laws and regulations, on the legal procedures are publicly accessible. The salaries of public officials, the structure of institutions are also published. According to them the problem with the bureaucracy is the high level of corruption and that only the above-mentioned type of technical details are transparent, but there is no transparency in the political decision making and the cash flow accompanying it.

Concerning the general image of the National Institution of Migration (INM), as public opinion surveys and the findings of my randomly spread survey also demonstrate, the population of Mexico trusts the agency to a low extent. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 7) On the rating scale for the question “To what extent do you consider the authorities, the police and the security forces correct, reliable and transparent?” 6 out of 13 respondents of the survey chose the most negative option: “not at all, and I am afraid of them”. No one chose the top of the scale “they are always reliable” answer.

These findings correspond with the fact that INM is often criticized for being corrupt and for taking measures it is not authorized for; what is more for being involved in violations, abuses against migrants such as kidnappings and tortures. On the other hand, since officials often cooperate with criminal organizations and smugglers, they might guarantee the “detention-free” journey of migrants in exchange for money.

I personally experienced the lack of harmonization of the INM institutions of different states: theoretically the local migration institutions are coordinated on a federal level, therefore the regulations must be the same in every state. However, when I asked for an official permit to stay twenty more days in the country after my tourist visa (180 days) expired, the following happened: I travelled to Oaxaca – using my personal connections – to apply for the paper. I paid the official price of the procedure and received a permit that allowed me to stay for an additional 20 days in the country. The official in charge retained my migration form – the paper tourists have to fill in at the airport and save it until they leave the country – saying the new paper I received substitutes the migration form. Two weeks later in the state of Quintana Roo, when I tried to check in at the airport

the personnel refused giving me the travel documents since I had no migration form. After four hours of dispute and phone calls to the head of migration affairs – who was my personal contact –, the only solution was to pay the fine for losing the migration form – same amount I paid for the extension of the visa – then filling in the form once again.

As my personal experience shows, even though there is public information on the legal procedures one can still have difficulties in complying with the regulations. Although, as Fuentes (personal interview, April 27, 2017) stated, “if you have money, all the laws are available for you.” In connection to the issue José (personal interview, May 3, 2017) noted that local migration authorities create internal regulations that are not published and are often unconstitutional. Alba and Castillo (2012) state in their study, “there is evidence that INM is trying to improve its public image and, in doing so, gradually becoming more effective” (p. 7).

5.3 How open and tolerant the Mexican society is towards immigrants?

All the migrants I interviewed had a completely positive opinion on Mexicans in general. They all described them as friendly, open and hospitable people who find the foreigners interesting and “special” (Cálix, video interview, May 4, 2017; Omar R., video interview, May 2, 2017; Migrants in COMI, group conversation, May 2, 2017). Those who came from Central American countries had no major difficulties in adapting to the new country thanks to the same language and the similar culture (Cálix, video interview, May 4, 2017; Migrants in COMI, group discussion, May 2, 2017; Omar R., video interview, May 2, 2017).

However, the interviewees also mentioned the typical problems of post-colonial societies, namely: On the one hand, as Cálix (video interview, May 4, 2017) noted, Mexicans are “*malinchistas*” meaning: they consider foreigners – in this case foreigners from outside the region – better, “superior” to themselves. While on the other hand, there is an inherent inequality within the society and a strong presence of internal racism: the society favours certain physical aspects that were privileged in the colonial times, such as whiter skin,

European features. Consequently Mexicans look down on people with indigenous characteristics and on foreigners from Central and South America. (Cálix, video interview, May 4, 2017; A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017) This general attitude creates inequity and intolerance against indigenous communities, amplified by linguistic and cultural differences. The same goes for Central American migrants. As Fuentes (personal interview, April 27, 2017) stated, “Mexicans treat Central Americans as the Americans treat the Mexicans in the United States:” Central American migrants – just as Mexicans in the United States – work hard in Mexico to be able to collect some money for a better life or to continue their journey to the U.S. Since they have no papers and are in great need for a job, the exploitation of migrants by Mexican employers is common (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017).

In the case of “privileged immigrants,” such as José Alejandro Cálix, Parastoo Anita Mesri or myself, the Mexican society is helpful in general, accepting and appreciating the work and the interest of foreigners. There are foreign communities all over Mexico, just to mention some of them: there are Japanese, German and Italian communities among others in Oaxaca (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017). Numerous Germans live in Puebla – mostly employees of Volkswagen and Audi car factories – and also there exists an Italian district. There are Chinese communities in Tapachula, Chiapas (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017); not to mention the colonial cities of Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, the typical touristic places such as Cancún or the multicultural capital, Mexico City that are common destinations of foreigners.

As for social awareness of the migration problems and the difficulties migrants face the interviewees reported: in those states where migration was part of the everyday life, such as Chiapas, Tabasco or Oaxaca, or the northern states alongside the border, people were more sensitive for these issues and consider it essential finding a solution for the problems of migration. While Mexicans living in states that were marginal regarding the routes of migrants had no deep knowledge and personal experiences on the topic. (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017) In conclusion: the awareness, openness and

sensitivity of Mexicans towards immigrants strongly depend on their place of origins, place of residence and their personal familiarities.

5.3.1 Results of the survey

By the survey spread via Google-survey using snowball sampling, my objective was the explore the general opinion and attitude of Mexicans towards those questions of migration that are relevant for answering the research question: how “prepared”, accepting and “liveable” is Mexico for foreigners; how easy or difficult it might be for immigrants to build up a quality life in the country. By collecting answers to the question my goal was to gain information on the factors that might contribute to Mexico’s transformation to a migration destination.

According to the results of the survey, the general opinion of Mexicans on immigrants is that they are individuals who are looking for job opportunities and a better, secure life. However, one person denoted the word “crime” as an answer and another noted that they contribute to the development of the country. One of the respondents had the opposite opinion: immigrants take the jobs from Mexicans.

About migration as such: the majority believes moving to another country might be a good opportunity to develop, earn some money. As an additional opinion the respondents of the survey also noted that people should rather work on the improvement of their own country and that migration is not essentially good but often necessary (due to the better job opportunities abroad). Two of the respondents emphasized that only regular migration is beneficial. As a brief conclusion drawn from the above-mentioned answers, immigrants seemingly are very often associated with unauthorized migrants who come to the country seeking employment or due to insecurity; and who might cause “headache” for the Mexican state since it must provide them employment and deal with the potential legal issues. This attitude somewhat corresponds to the previously described internal racism that is strongly present in the Mexican society.

To the question how accepting, tolerant the Mexican society is towards immigrants equal number of respondents chose the answers “*is not tolerant at all*”, “*tolerates the presence of immigrants but does not favour them*” and “*is predominantly tolerant*”. Therefore, the majority does not think Mexicans support the presence of foreigners in the country – that is consistent with the double-sided migration policy of the Mexican government: immigrants might be necessary, although to a small extent.

About the chances, perspectives of integration of immigrants into the Mexican society the respondents answered that it depends on whether they are authorized or unauthorized. They also distinguished the perspectives of Central Americans who are mostly transmigrants; and those of Americans and Europeans who live in financially sound circumstances in Mexico. About those who decide to stay in Mexico permanently, the majority thinks there are many possibilities in the country and the society appreciates the immigrants. Two of the respondents had a somewhat more unfavorable opinion. According to them the foreigners should expect to be “rejected” by the Mexican society and that immigrants are always in a worse position simply because they are not home. Two persons highlighted that the majority of migrants are only in transit; therefore they do not want to settle down in Mexico and get integrated into the society. In the answers above, we can observe the already discussed contradictory attitude of post-colonial societies, namely that they clearly distinguish “favoured” European or North American immigrants from those who come from the region. The respondents obviously stated that the opportunities Mexico can provide for foreigners mainly apply for “privileged” immigrants.

Concerning the difficulties and dangers migrants face on the territory of Mexico they listed the following problems: almost all the respondents mentioned the high level of crime, the insecurity, the dangers of irregular migration such as health problems, exploitation, violence and even death. Furthermore they added discrimination, difficulties in “showing that they are valuable for the society”, language problems, potential difficulties in finding employment and the risk of losing their family, as well as the problematics of legal documentation. Once again, we can observe the Janus-faced

attitude of post-colonial societies, the internal xenophobia; and that they are aware of the major problems such as the high level of crime and corruption.

Regarding the migration policy of the government and the work of authorities, the general opinion is that the government and the authorities are corrupt, incompetent and maltreat the migrants. The majority noted: they wish it will change – at least due to the growing level of migration – and regardless of the legal status of migrants they should be treated as humans. One person noted he has no sufficient knowledge on the topic to form an opinion. As already stated, to the question “*To what extent do you consider the authorities, the police and the security forces correct, reliable and transparent?*” 6 out of 13 respondents of the survey chose the most negative option: “not at all, and I am afraid of them”. No one chose the best “they are always reliable” answer.

Half of the respondents gave an affirmative answer for the question whether there were changes concerning opportunities for immigrants to settle down in Mexico. Some believes it is due to the new policy of the government regarding tourism; while the others gave no further explanation. The remaining part of the respondents did not notice any significant change. Furthermore, they also noted: with the globalization foreigners have more job opportunities in Mexico. However it makes for Mexicans even more difficult to find a job. Again the respondents highlighted the importance of regulated legal status of migrants. In this connection they mentioned the insecurity in the country as a potential deterring factor.

From the previous two answers we can draw the conclusion that: there really is a controversial opinion about immigrants, though at the same time we can observe the presence of empathy towards those who face great difficulties and are seeking a better life. Though, the respondents did not express it directly: this empathy could be explained by the long tradition of emigration of Mexicans to the U.S.; the Mexican society historically has its own similar experiences – and that corresponds to Granovetter’s notion of the strength of weak ties (being in the same situation). On the other hand, the

emphatic feelings of some respondents might derive from their proximity to migration routes – since the majority is from the state of Tabasco.

Finally, to the question whether Mexico is becoming a destination country of migrants and if so what are the causes of this transition, the majority gave a positive answer. According to them Mexico is becoming a destination country thanks to the beauty of its nature and its cultural richness. Many people however note that the insecurity and corruption might scare foreigners away.

For the last question *“Do you or your family have any experiences related to migration that might be interesting regarding the research?”* most respondents gave a negative answer, only two persons elaborated on their experiences: a man, 54 years-old from Oaxaca, living in Tabasco noted that he lived in the United States for 7 years. He entered the USA with a valid visa and stayed there for years after his visa expired. In the end he returned to Mexico due to economic problems and since he had been missing his home country. Another respondent, a 26 year-old woman from Villahermosa, Tabasco noted that her great-grandmother was an immigrant in Mexico from South Korea.

Here I would like to note once again that the survey results mainly represent opinions of the young adult generation since almost all the respondents belong to the age group of 20-30. This fact might explain the lack of personal experiences related to migration, although the majority of the respondents are from Tabasco, one of the southern states where migrants often pass by.

5.4 Legal consideration

Migration governance in Mexico as well as in the countries of the region undoubtedly need further development both in the institutional framework and in legislation. In the recent subchapter I intend to shed light on the problems they face, as well as on recent developments and further possible outcomes. I consider the analysis of legal aspects essential – and the personal conversations, experiences support my standpoint – since the

whole problematics of migration should come out of the twilight of public attention due to the fact that countries like Mexico on their way to modernity and globalization must put a greater emphasis on creating the adequate framework of the rule of law. As the findings of the research point out, the questions related to migration are on the periphery of the attention of Mexican society. Although in the future, with the strengthening of the rule of law migration related questions should inevitably shift towards the center of public attention. For the time being, as the results of the interviews, survey and the findings of the existing academic literature demonstrate: in spite of the ambitious aims and good intention, in practice there is still a lack of working solutions for these problems.

5.4.1 Criticism and suggestions for Mexico in the light of the findings

Regarding the new Mexican migration law, its general importance is that with its enactment, migration became a separate, high importance issue that is dealt with in its own legislative context of. Before the *Ley de Migración*, migration issues belonged under the General Population Law; Mexico had no distinct migration legislation. At the same time opinions vary: to what extent it has brought about changes in the situation of migration, and what real intentions “hide” behind the paragraphs:

Alba and Castillo (2012) refer to a section from the migration law that declares the following: “Mexico’s humanitarian tradition and its undeniable commitments to human rights, development and national, public and border security” (p. 15) always must be primal, therefore the authors suppose that it could lead to the negligence of the rules of the *Ley de Migración* whenever that is in the interest of the policymakers. Alba and Castillo (2012) also mention the possibility of inconsistency between the provisions of the law and the general practice of the authorities. Since the law and the new sanctions could not significantly improve the situation of migrants, their concern seems justified. Corruption, violation of human rights, trafficking in persons, frequent homicides, and so on, are still serious problems in Mexico, and not only in the case of migration.

Based on my personal experiences and on the conversations with experts on the topic, I consider the above-mentioned arguments well founded. As Maria (personal interview, May 2, 2017) who has years of experience in the field highlighted: the regulations and objectives of the new migration law – undoubtedly – emphasize the protection of migrants and migrant rights, the enhanced measures against corruption. The new regulation also facilitates the situation of immigrants in the country. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017) At the same time José (personal interview, May 3, 2017) pointed out the other side of the question, namely that migration legislation on the different levels is inconsistent and the arbitrarily created rules by local institutions are often unconstitutional and impossible to follow. Although, migration issues are supposed to be dealt with synchronised on a federal level.

In addition, the most common criticism about the law is that it has hidden objectives, namely: with the creation of the new migration law Mexico intends to urge the improvement of the situation of Mexican immigrants in the United States by acting as a “role model.” As we have seen, the *Ley de Migración* emphasizes the unrestricted respect of the human rights of all migrants regardless its migrant status, therefore, including irregular migrants as well. To compare, in the United States 59% of all unauthorized immigrants are Mexicans (Alba, 2013).

However, the critics also mention that the new migration law can be the manifestation of the unresolved human-rights issues between Mexico and the Central American countries, since the Central American states actively participated in the negotiations that preceded the creation of the migration law. The co-operation significantly lowered the tensions between the countries. (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 17)

Some say that the enactment of the new migration law is purely a result of the pressure of the international community; more precisely that Mexico is part of the Geneva Conventions. Thus the promising new regulations will not bring about any significant change in the situation of migrants and the protection of human rights. (Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017)

As for a general observation about the law: people usually do not have knowledge on the existence of the new migration law – not even high-ranking diplomats like Zoltán (personal conversation, April 11, 2017) and have not noticed any significant change in migration issues since its enactment in 2011. The changes in the situation of migration the interviewees noted were the greater number of migrants who enter the country and of those who get stuck in Mexico due to the increased difficulty of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017; José, personal interview, May 3, 2017) Additionally, they also mentioned the appearance of new ethnicities such as migrants from African and Asian countries (M. Fuentes, personal interview, April 27, 2017; José, personal interview, May 3, 2017; Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017)

Regarding the institutional framework of the country and the new migration law: in spite of the fact that the new migration law brought about some significant positive changes; there is still a lack of adequate institutional system, lack of transparency, and especially lack of resources that undermine the whole process of a successful transformation. (París et al., 2015, p. 33). They also state “the restrictive migration policies favour the illegal businesses and the corruption related to unauthorized migration” (París et al., 2015, p. 33).

As for the migration governance of Mexico, the study by The Economist Intelligence Unit (2016): *Measuring well-governed migration – The 2016 Migration Governance Index* analyzed and evaluated the systems of migration governance of fifteen countries, including Mexico. According to the results of the study, Mexico does not reach the best, “mature”, category in any of the analyzed segments (institutional capacity, migrant rights, safe and orderly migration, labour migration management and regional and international cooperation) However, in all categories, the country’s migration governance index is better than the lowest rating.

The findings note that the key aspects of migration issues the governments should focus on in order to achieve a comprehensive migration policy varies depending on whether we

analyze sending or receiving countries. In the case of sending countries the emphasize is on bilateral labour agreements, diaspora management, and the introduction of remittance schemes; while in case of receiving countries, promoting migrant rights, facilitating the process of integration and the management of migration flows are the priorities (The Economist Intelligence Unite, 2016, p.11).

Mexico as a traditional sending country is well aware of its duties in diaspora management and in supporting its nationals abroad, including the promotion of the protection of their rights, mainly by public diplomacy and community organizing (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 3). For example, the Special Migration Program (*Programa Especial de Migración*) 2014-2018 discusses and sets as objectives to be achieved as an answer for the challenges as a country of origin, destination or transit territory (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2013-2018).

As for the requirements to Mexico as a new destination country: the Mexican government – as one can observe in the new migration law – prioritized the issues of the protection of migrant rights and launched new programs to facilitate the integration of immigrants and returned migrants into the society. For example, recently, the government launched the program “Somos Mexicanos: Aquí Tienes Las Puertas Abiertas”, with the purpose of promoting the re-integration of the repatriated Mexicans (Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, 2016); or formerly started a program with the aim of educating the Mexican prisoners in the United States to facilitate their future re-integration. However, the program was not quite successful and involved only 700 captives. (Talsma, 2012, p. 29)

Here we must note that the envisaged deportation of 11,000 Mexican criminals from U.S. prisons might be a potential problem in the future. The return of such a large number of criminals would cause serious problems in their re-integration to the society; what is more it would lead to the further extension and strengthening of transnational criminal networks that might create a situation similar to that in Central American countries. (Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017)

In the case of other categories analyzed, the research highlights Mexico in the following aspects: For promoting “safe and orderly migration”, the research welcomes Mexico’s efforts on combating human trafficking, especially via the law of 2012 on trafficking in persons and the newly established agency of the Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Women and Trafficking in Persons. (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2016, pp. 25-26) It also emphasizes the leading role of Mexico in regional initiatives, such as the Puebla Panama Plan that aims at developing the infrastructure in nine Mexican and seven Central American states (Activists CIEPAC, 2002); as well as its commitment in bilateral relationships. In connection, The Economist Intelligence Unit mentions the U.S.-Mexico border collaboration and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), however, Mexico’s bilateral and multilateral agreements with the Central American countries also have great importance regarding the issue of migration:

In 2004 Mexico joined the Central American Integration System (SICA) with the status of a regional observer state. SICA (CA-4) is an agreement between Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua that allows the citizens of the member states to freely enter and exit the territories of the four countries with only an identification document. However, Mexico’s accession instead of focusing on migration had the purpose of concentrating on issues such as human smuggling, organized crime, violence or arms trade (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 12). Currently, Mexico and the Central American countries jointly work on regulating irregular migration via bilateral agreements and a binational commission (IOM, 2012).

Finally the research notes that Mexico needs further development in facilitating the access of immigrants to education, social security and health services. Although basic medical services are provided to migrants, the access to education, the issue of social security and advanced health care are problematic – mostly due to the different visa categorizations and additional fees. (p. 23)

5.4.2 Current situation in Central America

Concerning the topic of the research, it is inevitable to briefly summarise the recent developments and problems of migration legislation of Central American countries since Central American migrants are the main “drivers” of Mexican immigration issues. As the observations from the shelter of COMI also demonstrate, Central Americans are the most numerous migrant groups on the territory of Mexico¹⁹.

Regarding the migration management of the Central American countries and the recent developments: the region went through an extraordinary transition in the last few decades. More precisely, they achieved democratization, macroeconomic stability and managed to reduce poverty, which is one of the biggest problems in the area. However, large-scale migration still remain characteristic for the following reasons: on the one hand, the supply of domestic labor surpasses the demand; and on the other hand, due to humanitarian reasons such as the high rate of crime in the region and frequent natural disasters – mostly hurricanes and earthquakes. (Beteta, 2012, p. 15) As Hugo Beteta (2012) states, crime is considered to be the most important obstacle to achieve further development in Central America, since crime has very high social and economic costs that undermine fast development (p. 9). The narrations of the migrants of COMI (group discussion, May 2, 2017) correspond with the above-mentioned statements since the majority flee from their country due to the extreme level of violence. Migrant 4, for instance, during the group discussion told me that his whole family was murdered in Honduras by the *maras*. The others – from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras – mentioned that they were forced to leave their country due to the lack of employment opportunities.

Similarly to Mexico, the legislation of the Central American countries is lacking a modern, effective framework to control migration (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 9). Although, three of the CA-4 countries have joined some significant international treaties related to migration issues: Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras joined the UN

¹⁹ Statistically American citizens are present in the biggest number in Mexico, although the majority of them are U.S.-born Mexicans. Therefore, here we do not take them into account.

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant workers and Their Families (Guatemala and El Salvador in 2003 and Honduras in 2005) (Alba & Castillo, 2012, p. 11). In this connection, Alba and Castillo (2012) note that Central America is still “characterized by weak public administration, ad-hoc decision making, and an underdeveloped policy infrastructure” as well as by “corruption, abuse, and irregular application of laws” (p. 9).

In addition, experts state that the implementation of the CA-4 Agreement is still incomplete, many times officials who work on migration issues do not even know about its existence. Migrants who travel through these countries usually “try to cross the country as quickly as possible due to fear of reprisal, since they are not familiar with the territory or because they consider these acts [abuses] as part of the risks of their journey and not as the violation of their human rights” (París et al., 2015, p. 21).

6. Final notes

In the final, evaluating part of the thesis I summarize and conclude on the results of the findings as well as on the success of the research process. The *6.1 Assessment* section highlights the main results of the research and their importance, role regarding the research question in a broader sense: changing patterns of migration flows in Mexico. It also sheds light on the possible future scenarios. The *6.2 Conclusions* chapter briefly summarizes the research process and evaluates its outcome: to what extent could the research achieve its pre-set goals.

6.1 Assessment

Currently Mexico and its relations to the United States are in the crossfire of attention since the election, and especially after the inauguration of the new president of the United States, Donald Trump.

Relying on personal experience, throughout Mexico one can observe some kind of general anxiety, uncertainty concerning Trump's plans and also an even stronger antipathy towards the United States than usually. Some people even expected a war at least between Mexico and the U.S., but possibly even including more countries. The narrations of some of my American acquaintances support my observations. They told me, when they first met a Mexican and started to talk with them, the Mexicans had been very friendly and open until the moment when they got to know their nationality. When the Mexicans heard that they were from the U.S., their "face changed" and probably their attitude as well. In order to give an overall picture on these conversations, I must admit that the U.S. citizens who told me about their experiences do not support Donald Trump and here in Mexico – as they said – they usually "feel ashamed of being American" since they feel sorry about the insults against Mexico and Mexicans made by their country. This hostile attitude was the most strongly observable during a period after Donald Trump was elected, and when he rejected the Mexican president, Enrique Peña Nieto's visit to the U.S. to negotiate the issue of the wall – in case he did not intend to pay for it. That was the moment when people – at least on the Mexican side – started to worry that

the frosty relations between the two countries might soon escalate leading to physical violence. However, Trump's plans did not affect the general attitude of Mexicans towards other nationalities. In this respect I did not observe any change neither after the American elections, nor due to the news from Europe about the refugee crisis or about the frequent terror attacks.

Concerning the new U.S. policy - the extension of the wall, the enhanced border control and deportations of unauthorized migrants – it definitely threatens Mexico in some ways: countless analyses state that building a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border – where it does not exist yet – is simply impossible due to the geographical characteristics of the area. First of all, it is not manageable to build a wall along the Rio Bravo; furthermore, since the government should buy all the territories alongside the border from public owners and it is not in their interest to sell them. Finally the costs of the wall would be extremely high. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior, Ryan Zinke admitted the above-mentioned problems as well. (Ap, 2017) According to the article of La Jornada, the Democrat Senator Clair McCaskill noted that the government would need approximately 2,600 million dollars to build up less than 120 kilometres of the wall (Ap, 2017).

Some experts also warn: although with the wall alongside the whole border the United States aims at reducing the level of unauthorized and irregular migration the extension of the wall would hinder the return of those – mainly Central American – migrants who intended to return to their home countries. Therefore, obviously causing an increase in unauthorized migration since it “interferes with circular migration patterns” (Leal et al in Leal & Rodríguez, 2016, p. 6). Most importantly, it would lead to an even larger number of migrant deaths on the way to the U.S. for the reason that migrants would have to use even more risky strategies and routes to enter the country. As already stated, the people I interviewed were also worried about the potential problems the return of a large number of Mexicans along with the masses of migrants who accumulate all over the country would cause; in addition they emphasized their disagreement regarding the new U.S. policy as a possible solution for the problems of migration. (Cálix, video interview, May 4, 2017; Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017)

Some experts, such as Zoltán (personal conversation, April 11, 2017) believe that both the wall and the increased number of deportations are merely tools to receive more attention and gain voters, since there is a general xenophobia especially against *latinos* in the United States. However, according to these opinions, none of the threats will be followed by real actions since neither the United States nor Mexico has a real interest in it. Both countries know that the U.S. needs the cheap Mexican labour force.

As a conclusion of my findings: in order to improve migration management and the situation of migrants in the region, Mexico primarily should work on creating a comprehensive migration policy as well as on strengthening its already existing institutions, fighting against corruption to make the bureaucracy and the institutional framework capable of dealing with the pressing issues discussed in this paper. As José (personal interview, May 3, 2017) stated, another problem that hinders the development of migration governance is that the budget of the Mexican government expended on immigration issues is insufficient. A possible solution for the problem could be the reallocation of government funds and the prioritization of the issue of migration to and through the territory of Mexico.

Concerning the other side of the coin; regarding Mexican irregular emigration to the U.S.: Zoltán (personal conversation, April, 11, 2017) noted that the Mexican government recently publically admitted, there is a large number of Mexican citizens who were born in small, “hidden” villages and therefore have never got registered in the national system. Consequently, these people cannot be unauthorized immigrants in the United States for reasons such as the lack of a valid visa since they have no documentation at all. This issue – that certainly applies for other countries as well – further shades the already deep and multifaceted problems of irregular migration. Mexico established offices in the United States – as a solution for the problem – where immigrants without documents can receive papers such as birth certificates under an expedited procedure. However the pitfall of this quick solution is that the offices might unintentionally “open the door” for

people from Central and South American countries to claim themselves Mexicans and easily receive Mexican identification documents.

As for the assessment on the changing migration patterns on the territory of Mexico; the findings of the survey demonstrate however Mexicans consider their country a potential destination of migrants regarding its geographical advantages, the cheap prices, the openness and friendliness of the people they always emphasize the disadvantages that undermine Mexico's good international reputation – such as the presence of criminal organizations, the high level of violence, public insecurity, corruption.

The interviewed experts believe that currently Mexico still has a greater role as a sending and transit country of migrants than a new migration destination. It is due to its lack of economic power – especially in the neighbourhood of the United States – and to the high level of insecurity in the country. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017; A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April, 11, 2017, José, personal interview, May 3, 2017; Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017) The majority of migrants who enter the territory of Mexico seek the “American dream” and do not intend to settle down permanently in Mexico. The narrations of the migrants support this data: only one of the migrants, Omar, R. declared he wanted to stay in Mexico. Therefore, as the experts see, the pressing migration issues, such as the level of irregular migration, mean a seriously greater problem for the United States than for Mexico. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017; A. P. Mesri, personal interview, April 11, 2017, José, personal interview, May 3, 2017; Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017)

They confirmed, however, that the patterns of migration really are changing: the appearance of far away ethnicities such as Chinese, Indian or African migrants; the growing level of leisure migration and the globalization of smuggling networks for instance are new phenomena. They also noted that, although economic and humanitarian reasons are the major drivers of migration, the migrant networks also play a key role in the “evolution of migration:” Mexico has the second largest diaspora in the world, Mexican emigrants successfully built up their own strategies to make the emigration of

the new generations easier. Not only in the USA, but all over the world mass migration determined the irreversible march toward a kind of multiculturalism. As Maria (personal interview, May 2, 2017) noted, one can observe the same phenomenon to a smaller extent in Mexico: Cuban immigrants for instance more commonly settle down in Mexico permanently and create their own community. For nationalities from developed countries as well, Mexico is more and more becoming a popular destination to start a new life in. The first immigrants who arrive to the country – the same way as in the case of Mexicans in the US – open the doors for the younger generations to easily move and adapt to the host country.

As a final assessment: Mexico has embarked on the process of becoming a migration destination similarly to many countries recently worldwide. Since Mexico is a traditionally sending and transit country of migrants, it must create new strategies, “learn” how to deal with the probable greater level of immigration, not to mention the masses of Mexicans that might return from the United States. Mexico is already experiencing a crisis similar to that in Europe in the northern states, although to a smaller extent: thousands of migrants accumulated mainly in the border cities, such as Tijuana, due to the increased difficulties of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border. However, migrants temporarily or possibly even permanently settled down in the southern migration states as well, for instance in Oaxaca, Chiapas and Tabasco. (Maria, personal interview, May 2, 2017; José, personal interview, May 3, 2017; Zoltán, personal conversation, April 11, 2017) The situation led to a humanitarian crisis in the northern states; primarily the Catholic Church tries to solve it by migrant shelters and by helping the migrants to settle down and build their own community (Gómez, 2017; Muedano, 2017). This recent migration crisis is one of the factors that are “pushing” Mexico towards becoming a destination country.

Since the tendency all over the world is the same: the “destiny” of modern societies is globalization, constant free movement of individuals and the mixing of ethnicities, there is no way to stop the phenomena. Thus Mexico – and all the other countries in a similar situation – needs to adapt, to cope up with the situation and find new strategies via a

strengthened institutional framework, an effective comprehensive migration policy and through international cooperation – to successfully deal with the new challenges.

6.2 Conclusions

In the concluding section I present the main findings and evaluate them according to the objectives of the research.

The main goal of the research was to explore how the issue of migration is realized on the territory of Mexico in order to analyze the current changing patterns and the reasons of the changes. As the primary objective, the research intended to answer the question whether Mexico is becoming a destination of migrants and if so, what are the causes of this transition.

With the intention of providing a comprehensive – although not overall – understanding on migration issues in Mexico, the research was based on a mixed methodology of semi-structured interviews, a randomly spread survey and personal observations. The related topics were approached from a sociological, more “personal” perspective. The chosen methodology turned out to be suitable for investigating such a broad and complex topic as migration in Mexico. Through the different methods it became possible to cover those aspects of migration issues that were essential regarding the research question. The sociological approach facilitated gathering data about the real situation, actual problems migrants face. Especially conversations, interviews with migrants on the spot proved to be useful. Thus it became possible to complete the goal of the research: exploring the studied aspects from as many points of view of different actors as possible in order to avoid basing the research on potentially biased studies and policy documents.

The notions of migration described as the theoretical background of the research and the migration theories discussed in the *2.2 Literature Review* chapter greatly contributed to the research by providing a general understanding on the phenomenon of migration, its characteristics, motives and legal background of the issue. As already discussed in the

previous section, all the economic factors, personal motivations, contacts as well as the importance of rational thinking of individuals turned out to be crucial investigating the questions of migration. Although, as the research pointed it out: human movements are still motivated mainly by economic and humanitarian factors.

The further main findings of the research are the following:

- The patterns of migration are changing in Mexico, however Mexico primarily is still a sending and transit country for migrants.
- The recent global changes and the new U.S. policy unstoppably lead to unprecedented challenges for Mexico.
- There is a lack of effective migration governance – both on the institutional and the legislative level – in the country, mostly due to financial problems and the high level of corruption.
- The presence of criminal organizations and violence – not only in Mexico but in the whole region – undermines working solutions for the political-sociological-economic problems, including migration issues.
- The increased difficulty of entering the United States; Mexico's growing openness and sensitivity towards migration issues mainly due to the pressure of the international community; and that its relatively easy to enter and settle down in the country are visible factors that contribute to Mexico's changing status and potential future transition to a destination country.

Although some of the data sources – namely the survey – were limited, I believe the research achieved the pre-set goals elaborated in the *2. Research Framework* part of the thesis. Especially since the objective of the survey was not to provide a representative sample of the Mexican society but to further tone the findings of the interviews and personal observations. The main obstacles of the research came from the difficulties I faced in Mexico during the process of data gathering: the slowness of bureaucracy, the hard accessibility of migrant shelters and interview contacts as well as the high risks of conducting a field research.

In spite of all the inconvenience – in my opinion – the research successfully explored the targeted issues, managed to reach different actors of the question of migration and could provide answers from distinct points of view. Therefore, the research met the objectives set up beforehand: namely to conduct a research with the intention of exploring and connecting the factors that form the issue of migration on the territory of Mexico.

The research even managed to gather information that was not included in the academic sources used as the background of the thesis, such as the ambiguous question of the role of migrant shelters or the lack of experiences and knowledge of civil organizations. Finally the thesis could successfully provide an answer to the research question as well:

Although the patterns of migration are changing and Mexico more frequently becomes the final destination of migrants partially due to the increased difficulty of crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, its main role is still being the “producer” of emigrants to the U.S. and functioning as the transit country for migrants between Central America and the United States. As the main conclusion of the thesis we can say that Mexico’s status on the field of migration is changing; the country is facing new, previously unknown challenges. Having in mind that the development from a historical point of view and the social evolution are not reversible, the future developments of globalization and the accompanying migration crisis will give the final answer to the core of the research question whether Mexico becomes a migration destination.

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